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Hour Upon the Stage

By Ann Pinchot

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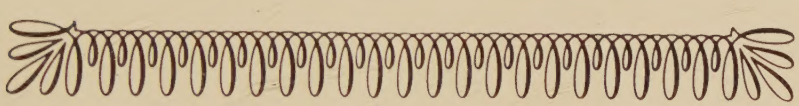

Life's but a walking shadow,
A poor player, who struts and frets
His hour upon the stage, and then
Is heard no more . . .

SHAKESPEARE

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Dedicated to the author's mother and father

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Note

All the characters in this novel
are imaginary.
ANN PINCHOT

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Book One

I

HOUSE OF CHALLANTY

I

Early noon.

The blazing sun whirled down a tornado of heat upon the city of Muskenaw, which squatted with the uncertain haughtiness of a parvenu on the small plateau overlooking Lake Michigan. Leaves of patriarchal trees, which had survived the devastating invasion of the lumber-crazed white man, faded into limp yellow rags. Blades of grass, nurtured on a soil which bore the ineffaceable imprint of lumberjacks, horse thieves, gamblers, prostitutes, lumber magnates, and Jewish peddlers, cringed under the scorching impact of white hot rays. Even Lake Michigan, once rippled lightly by the agile canoes of the red man and now plowed heavily by the tramp steamers of the Five Star Line, lay thickly still, like a molten sheet of cobalt lead, rimmed by yellow dunes whose sands had absorbed the penetrating sun rays.

The lower section of Western Avenue, principal thoroughfare of Muskenaw, was deserted. Shopkeepers and clerks collected in the coolest corners of their stores and worried over the paucity of customers and business conditions in general, or discussed the fluctuation of National Motor stocks.

From the cool, semidarkness of the store, Kopel Challanty stared unblinkingly at the white pavement, baked to an unbearable degree of intensity by the noonday sun. As he leaned in wilted sartorial perfection against a glass showcase which advertised the newest modes in masculine neckware, he watched a lone, barefooted boy hop down the street with incredible alacrity, hugging

the faint shadow that fell from the lowered awnings. Sympathetically, Kopel smiled at the boy's screwed-up countenance. Must be pretty hot on that sizzling pavement without shoes. He wondered where his own boys were at that moment. Probably in the back yard, dressed in bathing suits, turning the garden hose on each other. Laughing, splashing, screaming with merriment. Kopel wrinkled his broad brow, until his thick eyebrows met in a horizontal line over his prominent nose. He hoped they wouldn't disturb the neighbors. Still, he reflected: there was no cause for worry. If Miriam thought they were becoming too noisy, she would silence them quickly and effectually. Both Kopel and Miriam, his wife, wanted the boys to behave like little gentlemen at all times.

Slowly he approached the woman who had entered the store. "I wanna see Isr'l Challanty," she informed him. "I wanna see him person'ly."

Kopel blinked. His eyes, thick-lidded, bulging, and nearsighted, stared at the woman, dressed in cheap, elaborate clothes, her perspiring face greasy under its gaudy mask of cosmetics. Beneath her peremptory manner, he surmised a nervous uncertainty.

"Mr. Challanty is not in just now," Kopel answered, blinking again. His eyes, having concentrated on the white glare of the pavement, refused to focus correctly in the comparative darkness of the store. Black dots and black circles, big and small, round and misshapen pocked the woman's figure. "Can I help you?"

"No."

"You have a complaint, perhaps, about some merchandise?"

"No. I gotta see Mr. Challanty an' I gotta see him person'ly." She spat out the words with a forced aggressiveness.

It seemed to Kopel that the circles swelled into big, black balloons. Passionately, he wished that they would blot her out entirely, so that he would not be compelled to stand there and listen to her rasping voice and watch the perspiration streak her painted face and notice the queer manner in which she twirled her restless fingers among the beaded fringe of her bag. To see Mr. Challanty personally. God, would they never stop coming? Year in and year out. Woman after woman. Painted face after painted face. Gaudy dress after gaudy dress. Raucous voice after raucous

voice. Always the same refrain: "Gotta see Mr. Challanty person'ly." Always the same query. Openly. That was what Kopel resented the most. The openness, the brazenness with which his father conducted his disgusting affairs. Had he no consideration? no feeling for his grandchildren -- here Kopel shuddered -- if not for his children? Had he no pride, no --

Kopel stepped forward and then checked himself hastily. What was the heat doing to him? For a brief moment he had been overpowered by a murderous impulse against his father, against this greasy, cheaply perfumed, and overdressed woman, against the long, painful procession of gaudy, painted women -- God, what heat!

"Mr. Challanty won't be in to-day," he answered with as much courtesy as he could muster. Through the influence of Miriam, who came of a genteel family, Kopel had learned to be polite and self-controlled, even in moments of stress.

"Yes, that's what they told me over the 'phone yest'day an' the day before. But I gotta see him, I gotta!"

"I'm sorry. He won't be in to-day," Kopel repeated tonelessly, straightening a striped tie which had fallen from its assigned place on the tie rack.

"You can't put me off that way --" she began, her voice shrill with uncertain belligerence. "I ask you, ain't he here in the store? You *sure* he ain't here?"

"Mr. Challanty has not been in to-day." Kopel saw the short, thick-set figure of his brother Leon emerge from the office in the rear of the store, and sighed with relief. Leon would cope with the situation with absolute efficacy. Leon had a way of looking at these women, an insolent stare that commenced at their feet and traveled up, slowly, shrewdly, appraisingly, which put them in their place instantly.

"No, you aren't waiting, sister. This isn't a depot," Leon informed the woman tersely. "Leave your name if you want to, and I'll tell Mr. Challanty you called." He grinned at the woman's scowl. "Better run along," he urged.

As she turned reluctantly toward the door, Kopel noticed absently that her high heels were turned over and that a run

caterpillared its course down one of her sleazy silk stockings. He recalled that about two weeks ago he had come upon Israel wrapping up two pairs of the cheapest rayon hose in the store and carrying them off -- after soundly berating Teresa for helping herself to a pair of the two-fifty hose -- "Can't you wear the dollar stockings, heh? They ain't good enough for you?" -- With too obvious meekness, Teresa had placed the hose back into a box. Kopel wondered how many pairs she had smuggled out in her bosom that night -- and every night, for that matter.

Kopel frowned. With all the graft that was going on beneath the old man's very nose, it was indeed astonishing that the store showed the profit which it did. Lucky for the boys that Israel had so many other interests to look after that he devoted little time to the clothing establishment. If they all had to live on the salaries which Israel allotted them -- Well, Miriam would hardly be riding around in a new car, nor would Lotta, Leon's wife, be sporting so many diamonds and a new house in Muskenaw Heights.

That reminded Kopel: he must warn Leon to go easy. Heaven knew, Lotta was an expensive wife, but this new girl from the Elite Stock Company with whom Leon was playing appeared to be a regular gold digger, the kind Kopel read about in the newspapers. He had watched Leon pocket the cash from at least one half of his sales this last week. As playmates, Kopel did not approve of actresses. They were expensive toys and there was always the danger of a scandal. Of course, Lotta didn't care what Leon did as long as he paid her extravagant bills -- besides, she wasn't such an angel herself -- but if it were Miriam! Well, having Miriam for a wife put other women out of the question automatically. Kopel was hardly imaginative, but he could picture Miriam's genteel family discussing him. Their low murmurs: "How vulgar, but what can you expect? . . . the father, you know . . . yes, old Challanty himself . . ." Kopel shuddered and mopped his brow. Of course, he would never be foolish enough to compromise himself with a woman. What the devil was the matter with him? Was the heat affecting his brain?

He turned his glance to the door. The woman was still lingering at the entrance. He strode over to her: "Look here --"

He was silenced by the entrance of a short, obese man dressed in well-made clothes that were badly in need of a cleaning and pressing, his soiled panama hat pushed back on his head, his rotund face beet-red with the combined effects of the heat, hay fever, and high blood pressure.

As he saw Kopel addressing the woman, he scowled. "What you doing here?" he demanded of her angrily, his voice rising in fury to a falsetto squeak. "Deedn't I tell you never to come in the store, heh?"

"I gotta see you, Iz," insisted the woman, stepping close to him and grasping his hand. "I gotta see you right now. You understand, doncha?"

He shook off her grasp. "I'm very busy right now. I'll see you t'morrow." Kopel moved away, nervously.

"No, right now!"

"Don't bother me, now. I'm very busy to-day."

"Iz, don't make me mad!" Israel Challanty moved uncertainly before the obvious threat in her voice. "I gotta see you now, I tell you!"

"Well, you're seeing me now. What do you want, heh?"

"I can't talk here an' you damn well know it. Iz --" She stepped into the store again and Israel followed her with a sigh. Damn these women, anyway. You could manage them most of the time, but once in a while . . .

"All right! All right! Come in th' office an' we'll talk." He waddled down the length of the cool, dim store, scowling at Leon who was assorting boxes of underwear, and grumbling under his breath at the stupidity of Kopel. Opening the door of the office, he ordered Teresa, absorbed in the contents of a *Motion Picture Magazine*, to move out, and closeted himself with the overdressed woman in the tiny, stuffy cubicle. As Teresa heard the noise of the key turned in the lock, she winked with lewd significance to Leon.

II

Gregory, assorting cheap suits on a rack near the office, was too engrossed in his morbid thoughts to notice his father's arrival. He

sized the suits and counted them. Still plenty on hand for the clearance special, he thought. They'd come all right, the Wops and the Swedes and the Hunkies, from the National Motor Works and the Northern Lumber Yards and the Alison Knitting Mills, when they learned that Little Iz Challanty was advertising a sale. Expected good values from him, huh? God, didn't they realize yet that even on the biggest bargains he jipped them? Where was their intelligence, their shrewdness, that they let him get away with it? A clasp on the arm, a smile, and a remark with plausible seriousness that they were getting merchandise at cheaper than cost -- with these the old man won their confidence, and curiously enough, kept it! Bargains from Challanty -- what a joke!

Taking a fresh handkerchief from a showcase, Gregory wiped the moisture from his thin face and the palms of his narrow hands. As he moved toward the office to get a drink, his footsteps were arrested by a woman's voice, shrill with nervous fury:

"I ain't gonna take a chance, I'll go to a good doctor, I tell you -- And that costs -- what -- I need two hund'rd, yeh --" and his father's mellow-voiced chuckle:

"Like Hell you do!"

His moody blue eyes followed the square lines of the cubicle that served as an office. The old man and another woman. The blood rushed to his head and traced a fine network in the whites of his eyes. God, would he never be free of them -- of the store, with its petty bickerings and thievery among the brothers, of the old man with his series of frowsy, painted women, of Rita, with her soft voice and slender arms which choked him with the "understanding" that had once been so sweet and desirable! If only he had the courage -- the courage to break away -- to go anywhere, to tramp the road from Vermont to Colorado. . . He mouthed the names over and over again, conjecturing pictures of long, winding roads, plumed with young trees that would shade him from the heat of autumnal suns . . . rich, colorful foliage . . . silver birches . . . clear, swift rivers. . .

With infinite self-scorn, Gregory smiled. Daydreams on a hot morning. Courage -- Hell, he didn't know what the word meant! If he hadn't possessed the courage to break away before he was

twenty-five and the store and the old man and Rita had clutched and crushed him in an octopus grip, he'd never have it now. . .

"Brush your hair back, Greg, it looks untidy." Gregory whirled about to find Kopel, who was invariably as tidy as a fashion dummy, standing beside him, his arm checking Leon, who was attempting to listen to the conversation in discreetly lowered voices, which was taking place in the office. "Good enough for this damn joint," he answered uncivilly and turned toward the front of the store, where Teresa, her ferret face painted to a grotesque degree, was showing a lone, masculine customer the new summer sport shirts.

Gregory snorted with disgust. He pushed his long, nervous fingers through his dark, thick hair, rumpling it still more. Teresa making eyes at a customer, a common laborer from the Works. Well, it ran in the family, all right. The men couldn't keep their hands off cheap women and the girls -- Sophie, Teresa, and even the kid, Mattie -- chasing after flashy sports.

Loudly, the door of the office opened and the woman strode out, swinging her beaded bag and humming a gay little song under her breath. Her face was freshly powdered and painted and she carried herself with a cocksure swing. A wave of nausea dizzied Gregory and he sank down on a shoe bench. Day in and day out the same thing. Suits and shirts and collars and ties and hats and shoes. Trimming windows and sizing racks. Kopel and Leon and Danny and Barnett and Asher. Fighting among themselves. Stealing. Spying on each other. And all in fear of the old man, all in hate of the old man, all aching to hurt the old man, and all, *all*, in his power.

He tried to rise, but catching a glimpse of Teresa coating her sweaty face with another layer of too-white powder, he sank back on the bench and buried his head in his arms.

III

As he departed, Israel Challanty warned Kopel not to let that creature enter the store again. "Or any woman that wants to see me personal. Tell them I ain't in the store any more." As Kopel

turned away, he addressed Leon: "How much is the new house costing, heh?" Leon grinned, "Yeh, you can laugh, the money comes from my pocket, heh?"

He forbore directing any comments toward Gregory, who was slouching on a shoe bench, staring despondently into space. Gregory had a way of looking at the old man, without actually speaking, that made Israel uncomfortable and left him groping for words. Without another sound, he ventured out into the scorching street.

He waddled through Western Avenue, its customary commercial activities brought to a lethargic standstill by the blistering sun; turned up the Terrace, that wide street whose old, ostentatious mansions had for the most part been converted into stores and offices; hurried through the business section until he hit the residential squares which surrounded the large, ugly, red-brick Court House, opposite which, on Walnut Street, loomed his own house, an enormous yellow house, encircled by a large porch and a lawn which was shriveled to a mustard green. Israel did not believe in watering the grass on such a hot day. Just a waste of money. Beside, the paper said rain for the night.

Although he had just parted unwillingly with a sum of money which in his eyes was not particularly small, Israel smiled, disclosing under his reddish brush mustache a set of teeth that were too white and too perfectly matched. National Motor stocks had gone up five points that insufferable, blistering morning. . .

Following the uneven brick path, Israel entered the house through the side door. Contentedly, he rubbed his palms together and murmured, *"Gelt ist die velt . . ."*

II

POLISH PRIMITIVE

I

During the early years of Alexander the Second's reign, Poland was in a state of turmoil that bordered dangerously on chaos. For three seasons the crops had failed, and the peasants shook their heads, seeing in this catastrophe a foreboding omen. The horizon was gray with poverty; disease and despair stalked hand in hand. The downtrodden peasant and his fellow sufferer, the Jew, endured the agonies of prolonged starvation, mutely looking to Heaven for the morrow's sustenance.

It was during this lean, hungry period that Israel Challanty was born -- in the squat village of Krinock, which sprawls, a cluttered, ineffectual barrier in the long, winding road that leads to Brodno-on-the-Nemen.

His earliest recollection was of a sanded floor checkered with innumerable whining children, his brothers and sisters by his father's second and third marriages. Israel's own mother, a delicate, exhausted creature, had been unable to survive the devastating strain of Israel's lusty birth, and his father, a pious Jew, had remarried three months after her death.

As he grew older, Israel discovered that the emotion which he felt for the shabby wooden shack, consisting of two small bedrooms and a kitchen, was hatred. His dislike, at first vague and indefinable, extended to the first, and later second, stepmother, and gradually swelled into a feeling venomous in its intensity. Everlastingly, it seemed to Israel, the house was spilling over with tumult and stench -- a conglomeration of the cries of the children,

the *bleat bleat* of the sheep, the *cluck cluck* of the hungry chickens, the *honk honk* of the geese, and the scolding voice of the woman of the house.

When Israel was ten, the first stepmother fell exhausted upon her bed one evening and was too tired to wake up again. After her death, six months elapsed before his father brought home a wife to share his bed and board and accumulated children.

From an adjacent village, a young girl, the daughter of a poor farmer, had come to serve in the home of the wealthiest Jew in Krinock. She was blessed with a robust and healthy beauty, and an abundance of voluptuous gusto, which amply compensated for her lack of a material dowry. When the bride was led into the house, which for a half year had been left unhampered by the supervision of a woman, and which, consequently, was squalid and heavy with the nauseating uncleanliness of six human beings, as well as sheep, geese, and chickens, a revolution took place.

For one energetic week, she cleaned remorselessly, until the rooms were immaculate with whitewashed walls, freshly sanded floors, and clean bed linen. However, caring for a husband, five hungry and untamable youngsters, a home, and later a series of her own babies, proved too much even for her healthy endurance, for never again was the house as spotless as the memorable week when Israel's father brought home his third bride.

Early in his childhood, Israel discovered that unless he looked out for himself no one else would. And so by the time he was thirteen, he had learned to lie with plausible finesse, to steal -- although his thefts were confined entirely to food and cigarettes -- with commendable agility, and to evade the avenging hand of his parent when he was caught in any of these acts. He attended Hebrew school at fitful intervals -- only until his bar-mitzvah.

After his confirmation, the ritual of which he performed in a beautiful voice with a poor interpretation and pronunciation of the impressive Hebrew ceremony, his father berated him soundly and ordered him out of the house. The pious old man was profoundly immersed in Hebraic lore, and consequently, the ignorance and laziness of his first-born gnawed painfully into the core of his being.

The boy had a nice voice, a rich, deep baritone. If only he was the right kind of a youth, pondered the father, Moishe the Cantor would gladly admit him into the choir, and in time he would have the opportunity to become a cantor himself. . . But who would take an interest in such a lazy, impudent young apostate, who liked nothing better than to sit lazily in the sun all day long, or to mingle with the chattering peasants in the bursting market, or to frequent the baudy inn in the evenings, when it was crowded with drunken peasants and petty traders, or to follow the caravans of the walnut-skinned, scarlet-souled gypsies, who wandered from village to village in the summertime. . . Old Challanty sighed, and mourned the day that his first wife had died in the effort to bring forth a son for his happiness.

After his confirmation and the subsequent ejection from his father's home, Israel lived through a period of delightful freedom, never venturing in the vicinity of the wooden shack that was so overpopulated with babies and fowls.

During the summer months, he slept in the neighboring fields, and when the weather was inclement, he nestled under the sweet, tickling hay in a barn. He arose at dawn and wandered through the pastures, pilfering his breakfast from the fruitful soil or begging it from a housewife. On Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays he spent the whole day at the market place watching the bargainers, both venders and purchasers, occasionally helping a peasant unload his wares in return for a kopeck or a piece of fruit, and stealing a morsel of cheese or an apple or a handful of nuts whenever opportunity presented itself. Sometimes, he stood in the middle of the market place and sang in his warm, rich voice the gay and baudy little songs which he had picked up at the tavern and the crowds laughed and applauded him lustily and often tossed him a few coins.

Israel never forgot the first occasion on which he saw a gold coin. He was loafing in the market, hungry, having had nothing to eat all morning. It was a round yellow bit, no larger than a button, yet it procured for the man who held it in his moist palm a bag of juicy, scarlet apples, new tan potatoes, fat creamy cheeses and a variety of edibles. The boy gasped and rubbed his eyes in

amazement. It must be of magic, this coin, he thought; and even after a peasant had lumberingly explained to him the power of gold, he was still incredulous. But the germ was inoculated, and he vowed to himself that someday he must have gold. I'll have many yellow coins, he swore, many of them, to buy me everything. But how shall I get gold . . . how? . . .

Hardly remarkable that a lad of his temperament should prefer the glamour, the color, the life, the gayety, the noise of the open market to the somber and solemn atmosphere of the stuffy wooden synagogue.

However, his lack of interest in the pursuit of Hebraic studies did not keep Israel from ingratiating himself in the good will of the sexton, so that on cold wintry nights, when the thick snow covered the village with a heavy shroud in an effort to protect it from the dagger-edged north wind, Israel was allowed an undisturbed corner in the little wooden synagogue.

As he crawled into his corner on a freezing evening, his stomach filled with one half a herring, onion, and black bread which the sexton's wife had given him, his round, oval body covered with layers of rags, he curled up like a fat young cub and serenely fell asleep.

Once he awoke suddenly in the middle of the still night after a terrifying dream, in which he found himself sliding helplessly through a stream of hot liquid gold and trying to grasp, to clutch handfuls of the wonderful stuff which eluded his touch like quicksilver and which finally threatened to drown him. He felt the hot, yellow stream pouring into his mouth and nose, choking him -- he jumped up to find his body wet with perspiration.

As he stared wildly about him, his eyes focused on the aged Rabbi, who was sitting at a low wooden table, immersed in the Wisdom of Solomon. The flickering light from the tallow candle at his elbow lent an unearthly radiance to the clarity of the old man's features; and as the boy stared at the bent figure whose white, chiseled face was guarded by dark earlocks, and heard the monotonous drone of the man's voice, which was blotted out at irregular intervals by the shrill moan of the wind, it seemed to him that the candle flame grew brighter and cast a golden light on the

shadowed figure -- Israel screamed! Screamed uncontrollably, like a terrified child who is lost in the dark!

At twenty, Israel Challanty's body consisted of a series of mismated ovals. His thick, bullet-shaped head topped a balloon-like torso, so that despite his slim legs, his gait was similar to that of a stuffed goose. His hair, thin and straight, was the color of moldy rust, his nearsighted eyes shone like pale green glass beads between their red rims, his nose, short and bulbous, was marked with deeply indented nostrils, and his mouth glistened wet and sensual under the cloak of his reddish beard.

He spent his days roaming the fields or wandering through the market, his evenings at the tavern, and his nights in the company of buxom peasant girls, who were attracted to him despite his ugliness and the utter cruelty with which he treated them. By some undefinable characteristic of his personality, coupled with charm of his mellow and rich baritone, Israel had a way with women, and he made ample use of this charm; his brazen promiscuity appalled the Jewish community.

Finally, in order to earn some money and to see the surrounding countryside, Israel became a helper to Leibe, an aged graybeard who possessed a game leg and an oldish daughter and who drove a team from Krinock to the adjacent villages.

Sitting next to the old man on the seat of the wagon, after loading the cargo, Israel whipped up the tired, thin horses and sang lustily as they drove along the sandy roads streaming with sunshine or through the thick forests brooding with shadows.

Although he craved money -- money like the tiny gold coin which had so miraculously purchased a load of vegetables in the market -- he was uncertain of how to procure it, and although he intended to acquire much gold one day, he was, for the present, quite contented to ride the roads with old Leibe, to wander through the lively, turbulent markets, to visit the tavern and drink vodka with the peasants as their equal and to possess healthy young peasant virgins! Life was sweet and Israel Challanty was filled with the zest of living.

II

Although they had lived in the same village all of their lives, Israel Challanty seldom met or noticed Bessie, the daughter of Leibe the Teamster. In the first place, Israel did not mingle with the Jewish youth of Krinock. The young men were generally condescending to him, and the girls, having heard whispers of his disreputable relations with the *shikses* shied clear of him in fascinated repulsion. Secondly, Bessie was approximately six years older than he, and in youth, seventy-two months can erect an enormous barrier between the companionship of young man and woman, especially if the latter is the unwilling victim of the seniority.

Bessie was of a medium height and buttery plumpness. One could bury one's fingers or lips deep into her white flesh without feeling a bone. Her eyes were dark and brilliant, like living coals that flashed reddish flames which were reflected in the gloss of her black, curly hair. Her nose was long and straight and thin, an incongruous vertical repression in the full moon of her flushed face. She walked with a still, full-hipped tread that gave one a fantastic impression of unconscious voluptuousness. She was quiet and docile and stood in awe of all men. She obeyed her father's commands unquestioningly. She was a good girl.

Until Israel became a frequent visitor at the house, Bessie's life was restricted to the care of the home and her aged parent. Although she was appallingly slovenly about her own person, and often walked about for two or three days at a time without washing her face or body, she was scrupulously exact so far as the cleanliness of the house was concerned, and it shone immaculately the whole week round, not just on the Sabbath, as did many of the homes in the village.

She liked to work in the small garden, digging her thick, capable hands into the rich, damp soil. The sensation of her fingers clawing the smelly earth, planting seeds or uprooting tenacious weeds, sent a quiver of tremendous pleasure coursing through her veins.

Israel never ascertained just how he became intimately

acquainted with Bessie. Perhaps it was the inevitable result of his job, for he used to meet old Leibe at the bar in back of the house every morning and often the teamster would invite him into the warm kitchen for a bite of breakfast.

The first occasion on which Israel actually became conscious of Bessie occurred on a hot, sultry morning, when, after a night of anticipated pleasure resulting in evasion and frustration, he was hungry for a woman. Bessie, slouching around the steaming kitchen with her still, fleshy tread, had loosened the collar of her blouse, and as she served him, Israel noticed the round drops of perspiration coursing down her face. He traced their progress to the neck of her opened waist. How he would like to touch the heavy whiteness of her partly-disclosed breasts! How he would like to crush her full lips! How he would like to embrace her completely! As they drove down the lonely, sandy road, he did not disturb the air with the customary melody of his beautiful voice, but was enveloped in a lethargy of daydreams. His veins were bursting with a febrile fullness. The sun blazed down relentlessly on his round, obese body and the blood pounded with a hammer staccato at his temples, as he dreamed of possessing her. . .

III

It was inevitable that Israel should marry Bessie. One could, of course, possess innumerable peasant girls and go nonchalantly on one's way -- but a Jewish virgin -- the daughter of one's bread giver! . . . Although, undoubtedly, not even these scruples would have barricaded the path of Israel's desire if he had believed it actually possible to seduce Bessie.

Once, he had attempted, when he was alone with her in the house, to caress with greedy hands the full curves of her heavy breasts and the rich taper of her thighs, but she had evaded his grasp dexterously, so that he had caught only an intriguing taste of her soft plushiness. Her liquid ebony eyes had darted tiny red points and her large, smiling mouth had tightened into a thin, resentful line. With a flash of uncommon perception, Israel had felt it unwise to attempt forceful seduction. He recalled the ripple

of her muscles under the smooth bare skin and his vanity cringed under the intuition that he would not meet with success. . .

He married Bessie, He married her and moved his few, shabby garments into the clean wooden house, and shared the exhausted team with old Leibe and the creaking bed with his daughter.

Marriage caused scarcely a ripple of change in the lazy flow of Israel's life. Except, perhaps, that he ceased to frequent the tavern with his once customary regularity, and for a short time he discontinued his promiscuity with the peasant girls. Bessie proved to be as quiet and obedient a wife as she had been a daughter. She followed his whims and commands with incredibly respectful alacrity and docility. In time Israel commenced to feel a vague, contemptuous affection for her, as one is apt to feel for a bit of property over which one has absolute possession.

Bessie loved her husband in a nebulous, bovine fashion. She showed her affection in the customary wifely manner, cooking tempting dishes for her man, who was a crude gourmand, tending his clothes, and allowing him to possess her at his will. She was happy and contented. When she grew heavy with child, she used to sit in the sun all day long and stare blankly at the rich earth that bore delicate green things and emanated such a fragrant odor, and dream of the baby she carried under her heart.

Israel did not show great happiness at the news of her pregnancy. He felt none of the pleasures of potential parenthood, only its inconveniences. . . However, he took the apparently unavoidable with good grace and upon the birth of his first son, Kopel, he spent the evening at the tavern treating the peasants and a few of the Jews with lavish drinks of vodka. Unconsciously, the parental instinct asserted itself. He had produced a son! He!

IV

Yom Kippur.

Most solemn and sacred of nights! The narrow wooden synagogue was lit by pale tapers whose reflections wove fantastic and grotesque shadows in the dark corners. Tall men and short men, young men and old men, all bearded and wrapped in prayer

shawls, stood together. Their lips mumbling guttural syllables, their clenched fists beating their breasts thrice in devout penitence, the light of ancestral faith shining in their eyes, they were like innumerable shrouded ghosts rising above the dust and mire of their earthly existence, welded together for one brief, supplicating hour into a holy community. Israel -- face to face with God. . .

The Rabbi, a fine old patriarch, arose and uttered the introductory pronouncement of the Atonement Services:

> *"In the celestial and worldly tribunal, with the permission of the Almighty and this holy congregation, we declare it now lawful to offer prayer with those who have transgressed."*

Israel Challanty, clad in dark new garments, his reddish beard trimmed to a neat arc, sat beside old Leibe, on a wooden bench near the door. Bessie, the suckling child at her breast, was among the women on the balcony, who were hidden from view by a long curtain. *Kol Nidre.* Israel, infected by the spiritual contagion of the moment, sang in a mellow baritone, raising his glassy green eyes heavenward. *Kol Nidre*. . . His cry blended in with the heavy, supplicating tones of the Cantor. He was deeply moved by the ancient melody, regretting for the moment that he had not sung in the choir, that he had not become a Cantor himself. He pictured himself in white skull cap and prayer shawl, repeating thrice: *Kol Nidre . . . Kol Nidre . . . Kol Nidre. . .*

At the conclusion of the Kol Nidre, the congregation responded with the prayer:

> *"And the Eternal answered, I have pardoned as thou hast said!"*

As by an unseen force the door was thrown open -- A gust of wind -- A shudder of foreboding convulsed the congregation. A *pogrom?* Stefan, the peasant, stood in the doorway, his wild,

bloodshot eyes searching the shadowed room. Stefan, the farmer, whose young daughter boasted of the most beautiful golden hair in the village.

"Israel," he growled. "Where is the young Jew, Israel?" He strode up to the altar and faced the men who collected about him. The lights of the *menorah* cast eccentric shadows on his distorted face.

They crowded thickly around him, supplication in their voices. . . Israel had not come to *shul* yet. . . "You lie, he is not at his house, nor at the tavern. . ."

Stealing, white-faced, out of the narrow, wooden synagogue while the trembling old Rabbi pleaded imploringly with Stefan. . . Israel recalled that wintry night in the synagogue, years ago . . . his dream of gold . . . and the terrifying illusion that the aged Rabbi, bent over a *seifer*, was drenched in a golden mist, upon his awakening. . .

Running stealthily toward the wooden hut and taking the saved rubles out of their hiding place behind the brick oven . . . all the while staring back . . . watching. . . No time to bid good-by to Bessie. . . She would not question the wisdom of his hasty departure, with death. . . and perhaps the atrocities of a *pogrom* . . . staring them starkly in the face. . .

Night of terror -- Thick, giant trees whose branches writhed like serpents in the malignant wind. . . Owoooo, the mocking owl. . . Distant shriek of hungry wolves. . .Mustn't lose the way. . . Keep on walking straight to the side of the road, in the protecting shadow of the brush, to avoid road marauders. . . Blond hair . . . long, thick, silken, that one could bury one's hands into . . . and even pull, to watch with amusement the contortion of the little flushed face. Why did one get so much pleasure from these things? . . . Owooo, again the wretched owl. . . Like to wring its neck. . . Stefan's daughter had golden locks, like the gold of his dream. . . Ouch, mustn't stumble again . . . mustn't get frightened . . . reach Tavrick all right and from there across the border. . . And then where? . . . Howl of distant wolves. . . And then where? Skies heavy with collected fury. . . Snow, tomorrow. . . Like the

snow . . . liked the jingle of the sleigh bells . . . coming home at night. . . Bessie. . .

God, there must be no *pogrom*! Blood . . . severed limbs . . . old Jews with plucked beards. . . Blood. Women. Girls. Bloodblood-blood. . . No, no, there would be no *pogrom* as long as he had stolen away. . . Night of Atonement. . . Kol Nidre. . . Why wasn't I a cantor? . . . Tramp on steadily, shortwinded, mustn't stop. . . Tavrick. . . Steal across the border. . . Ah, the old Jews could smuggle one across all right. . . Where to go? where to go? . . . Owooo, of taunting owl. . . Golden locks, ah, sweet smelling. . . Gold of his dream. . . Walk straight. . . Mustn't lose the way. . .

Tavrick. Another night of terror. Gendarmes opening fire. . . Old Jew whipping up horses . . . fasterfasterfaster . . . shots die off in the distance and reverberate through the silent forest. . . Over the border. . . Now where? where? . . .

Stench of five hundred human beings herded into narrow, stifling quarters . . . old men and young men, old women and young women, babies, children everywhere. . . Dank perspiration mingling with the odor of rancid foods. . . Everybody moaning, wailing, seasick. . . Steppes of green glass the color of Israel's eyes when he stared heavenward in his prayer shawl. . . Henry Rabenstein, the slim, blond youth who had escaped conscription and had left a charming girl wife behind him. . . To Henry, Israel clung tightly in his bewildered uncertainty. . . Turbulent seas and foam-crested waves the color of Israel's eyes when he entwined his fingers in thick, yellow hair. . . Seasick. . . God, God in Israel, will we never see land again? Sunrise as golden as the gold of his dream: America.

III

VIRGIN TIMBER IN A GOLDEN LAND

I

Upon their release from Ellis Island, Henry Rabenstein took the friendless Israel Challanty under his protection. When his Americanized relatives, who lived on Broome Street in a stuffy, three room flat, offered him a bed until he got his bearings, he brought Israel along to share part of it.

The clamor, the bustle, the ear-splitting noise of the East Side, crammed to the overflow with men and women and children of every age and description and nationality, spilling in motley collections over the stoops of the wooden tenements and seething around the long rows of pushcarts, which seemed to hold every variety of merchandise in the world, all bewildered Israel to the point of nauseous confusion. The first week in the new, confounding country, he refused to venture farther than the hall door of his temporary home, stricken with terror at the thought of losing himself in the milling, whirling mobs.

Within a fortnight, however, his old impudence and curiosity reasserted itself, and he wandered for hours through the narrow streets, listening to the shrill, enticing cries of the peddlers; watching unkempt women, with dirty, crying children at their skirts, haggle for fish or dust-covered vegetables or overripe fruit; even following the old, white-bearded Jews to one of the little basement synagogues or to the great synagogue on Norfolk Street.

Hester Street lined with pushcarts, the air thick with the mingled cries of the venders and the purchasers. The steam elevated, a giant, iron caterpillar that crawled along the Bowery.

The saloons. The Italian peanut man, with his black mustaches and scarlet 'kerchief. The bearded old Jew peddling hot sweet potatoes. The sharp clang of the fire wagons. An old woman with a dark shawl over her head selling pretzels on long sticks. The old-clothes man, whose nose was invariably in need of a handkerchief. The gangs. These new sights were a source of never-ending interest to him.

Still possessed of a sufficient sum of rubles, he joined Henry Rabenstein when the latter decided to try his fortune in the west -- Chicago. The long, dreary hours of travel on the dirty immigrant train, filled with the stench of perspiring blond Swedes and garlic-smelling dark Italians, and decayed food and thick tobacco smoke was a nightmare to Israel, accustomed to an out-of-doors life, but still it was scarcely worse than the dragging voyage over uneasy, turbulent seas.

In Chicago, Henry Rabenstein and Israel again shared a bed in a tiny bedroom. Henry found work, as a porter in a dark, smelly saloon which was frequented by the Irish bricklayers and plasterers who worked in the neighborhood. He lived frugally, saving every penny to send to the pretty girl whom he had married just before he left Poland so hurriedly. . .

After a week in the middle-western city, Israel found that his rubles, which changed into American dollars had depreciated fifty per cent, were rapidly decreasing. He must find work immediately. He tramped the streets, inquiring in every clothing factory and store that was bannered with a Yiddish-letter sign, but he was unsuccessful in his search. He could speak no English. Not even the broken dialect that passed for English in the neighborhood of Halstead and Maxwell Streets.

"Perhaps you will try peddling?" suggested Henry one evening, as they supped on black bread, herring, and a pint of frothy beer. Israel had wasted two, what seemed to him interminable weeks in the fruitless search for work. Apparently nobody wanted a "greenhorn."

"It won't cost much to buy some goods, shoestrings, socks, buttons, a little of everything," Henry continued. "And maybe you will be successful."

Following Henry's advice, Israel spent the last of his rubles on a small collection of merchandise. With high hopes in his heart, he commenced to peddle along the mobbed streets, calling in his rich, melting voice:

"Stock'n's! Henk'ches! Stock'n's!"

That night, he came home with a tired body, aching feet, and a light heart. His first day as a peddler had proved a fruitful one. He had the knack of selling; disinterest and rebuffs did not discourage him. He wormed his way into the less congested quarters, walking slowly along the street, limping because of a blister on his right heel, stopping before each stoop, pleading with anyone who would give ear: "Buy, lady! Chip, henk'ches, stock'n's! Chip!" Often he was chased away from doors, sometimes a dog was sent after him, but these trivial incidents by no means dampened his spirit. He began to earn tidy sums of change, one day a bit less, the next, a bit more. He bought more goods, including remnants of silk picked up cheaply at the local mills, all of which he carried in an enormous pack over his shoulder. He learned the tricks of his new trade quickly, shrewdly.

After he had been peddling for about twenty-four weeks, he learned that across the broad, glittering expanse of water that bordered Chicago like a front piazza, in the state called Michigan, lumber camps abounded. And camps, he was told, were a golden market for the clever peddler.

More business. Good business. When he heard these words, Israel brightened up like a shining coin. Of course, it was a bit dangerous venturing into the lumber region, which was peppered with crude, reckless men -- but more business -- More business meant more profit, and Israel had learned to love the burnished copper pennies and heavy silver dollars -- and to horde them. More than once he had gone without a proper meal because he did not want to break the large, round coins that lay so securely in the tin box. With those coins he could buy for himself anything in the world -- he must have more of them!

After an emotional parting with Henry Rabenstein, Israel took the steamboat, which glided through the placid waters of Lake Michigan, to Little Rapids, and from Little Rapids, he walked

twenty miles, with a huge pack on his shoulders, into the lumber settlement called Muskenaw.

II

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, Muskenaw, perched on the leveled mound of soil overlooking the crystal blue waters of Lake Michigan, was undoubtedly one of the most boisterous and picturesque settlements in the entire lumber region.

The tall, powerful old trees of the thick, virgin timberlands offered employment to hundreds of swaggering, reckless men by day; and Dago Mike's Saloon and gambling den and the row of unpainted wooden shacks known as the Red Light District afforded them pleasure by night. At multi-colored sunrise, the frosted air was filled with the buzzing grate of innumerable saws and the ominously heavy fall of butchered trees. At luminous moonrise, with the twinkling notes of a cheap piano, the popping of corks, the fine crash of shattered glass, the hoarse, raucous voices of pleasure-mad men, the shrill, screaming laughter of money-mad women -- all seasoned with the mingled stench of perspiration, cheap perfume, whisky, and pungent pine needles.

In the untamed settlement, one smoky autumn dawn, Israel Challanty, desiring to purchase food for his morning meal, announced his presence by pounding on the door of the general store.

The door was eventually opened a bit and a grizzly gray head peered through the crack. "What t' hell yuh want?" a hoarse whisky voice demanded.

It was food he wanted, Israel answered, taking out a silver dollar and holding it in the open palm of his hand.

The flash of silver in the early dawn worked like magic. The door opened swiftly, and Israel entered a large, square store, whose walls were cluttered with uneven shelves housing everything from tinned foods to heavy plaid jackets. After buying a small lot of supplies, Israel inquired for a room and the old storekeeper offered to rent him, for a very nominal sum, a tiny cubbyhole in his own quarters at the rear of the store.

Israel spent the morning surveying the village and getting his bearings. The long, sandy main street was bordered on one side by Dago Mike's Saloon and the row of unpainted wooden shacks reeking with cheap scent and filled with feminine laughter, and on the other side by the offices of the Northern Lumber Company, the general store, and a half mile down the street, adjacent to the dock, the saw mill. Interspersed at irregular distances between these buildings of major importance tottered a half dozen two-story houses that served as hotels and restaurants.

In Muskenaw, the business effort of Israel proved overwhelmingly successful. The lumberjacks made sport of the short, rotund little Jew and his Hebrew accent, and he accepted their derision and stood for their playful tricks with a grinning good nature, adding the price of their amusement to the wares they bought of him.

When the owner of the general store found that Challanty's enthusiastic peddling was seriously interfering with his own business, he ordered Israel out of his cubbyhole. Israel moved to the smallest room in the cheapest hotel. He sent to Chicago for more merchandise, including embroidered undergarments and bright, gaudy trinkets, which he exhibited to the women who lived in the row of unpainted wooden shacks.

Business with prostitutes, Israel found, was apt to prove even more profitable than with lumberjacks. The women spent money freely and bought madly. Besides, they were often kind to Israel. For the gift of a bright string of beads or a waist-length of cloth they repaid with sweet generosity.

Israel prospered. He knew how to ingratiate himself into the graces of the lumberjacks and the women, who accepted him amusedly and nicknamed him "Little Is," a title which clung to him forever after. Goods were shipped to him regularly from Chicago, and every day he made the rounds of his route in Muskenaw and the adjacent settlements. Slowly, gradually, he commenced to accumulate gold -- like the gold of his old dream. He was happy.

III

Lola was as slim and graceful as the green reeds that blew in the marshes of Muskenaw Lake. She possessed a becoming olive pallor, thick, even eyebrows that stood guard over sleepy, purple-brown eyes, and a mouth that sent men into madness. Sometimes she danced and sang naughty little songs in Dago Mike's Saloon. Then she would whirl her short, full skirts, disclosing tapering white thighs to the greedy eyes of the drunken crowd. She warded off unwelcome embraces with a smile, a taunting, impudent smile that spurred men on to touch her, to lay hungry hands upon her.

Lola lived in the first of the row of unpainted wooden houses next to Dago Mike's Saloon. She was the only girl whom anybody's money could not buy for the night. She picked men by the attraction they held for her, and only the favored ones could cross the threshold of her bedroom.

For some time previous to Israel Challanty's unassuming entrance into Muskenaw, Lola had been devoting most of her delectable attention to Martin Holabird, the towheaded young man who had arrived from the East to act as bookkeeper for the Northern Lumber Company and who occasionally dropped in to Dago Mike's for a drink or to watch the faro players.

On nights when Lola danced and sang her naughty little songs in Dago Mike's Saloon, young Holabird was to be found among the crowd in that sharply lit hall, which was splotched with the dark clothes of the awkward, hilarious men and the bright dresses of the painted, perspiring women.

"You're not made for this sort of thing, Lola," Holabird would expostulate with her later, in the stifling perfumed heaviness of her room. "Dancing for these beasts. Singing risque songs for them, to excite them. Seeing their eyes on you drives me mad. You ought to quit this, I tell you! You must quit it!"

But Lola would only smile enigmatically at his flushed fairness, without responding verbally. She liked the thin, blond boy with his deep-set eyes that shone like pools of moonlit water in the tan of

his long face. And when she answered his pleadings with her scarlet mouth and tiny, pointed breasts, Holabird forgot to expostulate. . .

For about a week previous to Challanty's arrival in Muskenaw, Lola had given no man the customary sweet favors. Holabird was filled with elation. Youthful, idealistic, and knowing of women only what he read in books, he believed that there was something fine in Lola's character and that he could bring it out. He spent hours reading to her, and wove beautiful pictures around her. And then, one day, he heard the rumor that the little Jew peddler had tasted of Lola's olive beauty.

The rumor was true. Despite his ugliness, his crudeness, his selfishness, trifling women found Israel Challanty dangerously appealing. And Lola, sated with the physical prowess of the lumberjacks, the sensuality of the slack-muscled gamblers and the youthful idealism of Holabird, was at first amused and later fascinated by the fat little Jew who brought her negligible gifts of cheap silks and cheaper beads.

Finally, late one evening, when Challanty was visiting Lola -- a fascinating Lola with her dark curls sewing loose patterns on the shoulders of her scarlet kimona, Holabird, his skin greenish under the tan, burst into the room.

Under his menacing gaze, Israel sprang up hastily and scurried under the bed, like a rat to cover. Lola ran up to Holabird, putting her hands on his shoulders. "Marty," she cried, forcing tears into her eyes.

Holabird shook her grasp off roughly, with disgust. Still she clung to him. He pushed her away violently and she fell sobbingly to the floor, near the bed. Holabird left the room.

A moment of silence. Then Israel, in sticking his head out from under the bed to reconnoiter, bumped pates with Lola. The accidental blow jerked her into action.

She sprang up. "Get out of here, quick, you greasy little Jew!" she screamed.

Awkwardly, Israel rolled out from under the bed. "Get out --" she flung open the door.

"Nu, nu," murmured Israel to himself. "Who ever thought it would end like this?"

Never again did Lola admit him into her presence.

IV

ISRAEL AND THE ROSES

I

Two years after Israel's arrival in Muskenaw, a second Jewish settler wandered into the lumber camp. Ben Rose was a stooped, withered old German Jew, with a short, white beard that was yellow around the mouth, twinkling eyes that were set too close together under the bridge of his enormous bony nose, and big hands with knotted fingers. He had arrived with two sons: Ike, the younger, and Abe, the older, and Fannie, an unmarried daughter of sixteen. He was a quiet, friendly, respectable, and God-fearing man. He cobbled shoes for a living.

In Muskenaw, he rented the front chamber of a dilapidated house. Ike, who had learned to write a few words of English, printed an unevenly lettered sign to hang up in the window. The advance rent took up all of Rose's money, so for the first four days of their new life, the family existed on stale bread and watery soup. Then the lumberjacks began to bring in their heavy boots to be mended and thereafter the Roses ate fresh bread. . .

Israel was pleased to find that another Jew had stumbled into the settlement. For two long years he had lived among Gentiles, hearing only English, with Italian and Swedish and Irish accents. No one with whom he could speak a word of Yiddish for twenty-four long months. . . True, he was so taken up with business, with peddling goods and sending for more goods, with establishing friendly relations with the girls of Dago Mike's and the women of the surrounding settlements, that he had little time to think of loneliness. Coming home late at night, after tramping

through mud and rain and sleet, tired and hungry, he was contented just to snatch a bite of food, a glass of tea with a dash of rum, and to fall into bed, wrapping himself in the heavy horse blankets that sent waves of comfortable heat through his frozen body. . . Yet he felt the want of some other interest in life. . .

Yes, it was pleasant indeed to welcome another Jew in the settlement. It made him feel, somehow, less alone. Perhaps this man Rose would invite him over on Friday night and he would taste of Jewish cooking once again, at a table decked with a white cloth, holding two candles in heavy candlesticks. . . He recalled how nicely Bessie used to bless the candles, first washing her hands and putting her wedding band on her finger, covering her dark, curly hair with a white cloth, raising her hands above the pinpoint flames of the sputtering tallow candles and chanting in a singsong voice: *"Boruch Ato Adonai Elohenu. . ."* The gleaming tumbler of red wine over which he said the *Kiddish*. The *gefilte* fish, the roast chicken drowsing in gravy, the clear, golden noodle soup. . . Memories. . .

Yes, he must become acquainted with the Rose family. He would enjoy a Yiddish Sabbath again.

Cordially, old Rose welcomed Israel into his home, and the two men became friendly to the point of intimacy. For Rose, too, found it a pleasure to meet another Jew in this wilderness.

On the nights that Israel came home early, he used to stop at the Rose home to eat supper. At first, he offered to pay for his meal, but the old man brushed the coins aside and replied brusquely that he did not sell his hospitality. Never again did Israel attempt to pay him. Occasionally, however, he brought a remnant of bright cloth for Fannie, who showed her profuse gratitude by spending hours in the kitchen, preparing delectable dishes for his palate.

On Friday nights he cut his route short and hurried home to wash and change into a clean shirt and Sabbath suit of clothes. Then, he rushed to the Roses, who now lived in a small shanty, a square from the long, sandy thoroughfare that was Western Avenue. Together with Israel and the Rose boys, both awkward, dark-haired, long-nosed fellows of medium height, the old man recited the evening prayer and then *Kiddish*, before a full table,

decked with a shabby but immaculate cloth. Fannie was not adept in the art of cooking, but the soft boned perch, fresh from Lake Michigan, and cooked in milk with plenty of onions, tasted delicious to the men.

In his weekly letter to Henry Rabenstein, Israel spoke at length of the Jewish family who had come to Muskenaw and saved him from the boring company of the Gentiles. He described the old man, the energetic boys, who had gone to work in the saw mill until something better turned up; and the girl, rosy-cheeked and curly-headed, who cooked and kept house. "They are fine people," he wrote. "The old man ain't got much education, but a heart of gold. They are good sons, his boys; they'd do anything for the old man and the girl. Real fine people . . ."

II

During the ensuing winter months, Rose cobbled shoes, his boys worked in the saw mill, and all of them hoarded their earnings. They bought a little house on Western Avenue, renting the upstairs chambers to several men who worked in the Northern Lumber Company's offices. Old Rose used the front room for his workshop, and passersby could see him, day in and day out, stooping over his awl, his white-bearded mouth filled with tiny nails, his hammer pounding a rapid, steady beat on the heavy soles of heavy boots.

As they sat over their tea, one icy winter evening, when the wind, sweeping the breadth of Lake Michigan, careened madly against the corners of the house, old Rose remarked to Israel:

"My son-in-law ain't making out good in Indiana and my daughter is -- well -- in the family way. I sent them money to-day they should come here."

"Yesss?" Israel murmured, taking a bit of loaf sugar between his teeth and sucking in the hot amber tea.

"Yes. Julius ain't much of a money maker. I guess he can make as much here as anywhere. Besides, I want Rachel near me. She ain't got no one in Indiana."

Israel did not like the old man's son-in-law, Julius Wald. He was

a queer fellow. He walked around in a daze, seldom speaking a word. Secretly, Israel envied his physique, for he was a tall, slim, dark young man, with pale chiseled features and a high forehead plumed with a mop of straight black hair as silken as corn tassel.

Rachel, Israel liked better. She was short and plump and docile, and at that time, her torso was swelled to an uncomfortable rotundity. She liked to cook, and spent hours fussing in the kitchen. She was untidy about her person. She reminded him of Bessie, and once he almost kissed her.

"Now that you've got him here," Israel inquired of Ben Rose one crisp morning as he was passing the window where Rose was re-soling shoes. "What are you going to do with him?" Invariably, Israel waxed sarcastic when referring to Wald.

"I don't know. He tried the saw mill but the work was too hard for him. And of course, cutting timber is out of the question. He ain't strong enough for that kind of work." Rose sighed.

"Ain't strong enough, heh? Hell, he's strong enough all right! But he ain't got the guts to go out and work. He's plain lazy!"

"No, no!" Rose hastily rectified this misconception. "No, he's willing. I give him credit for that. But he ain't used to this kind of work. He never did it. In the old country, before he married Rachel, he was learning to be a Rabbi --"

As Israel turned into the shoveled path, Rose called him back. "Israel, tell me, what would you advise? What shall I do with him?"

Israel shrugged his shoulders. "How can I advise you?"

"Maybe he could become a peddler, no . . . ?"

Israel stared at the old man's questioning face. "You're crazy," he answered rudely. "Him a peddler? Why he don't even know what the word peddle means!"

"But he can try! There ain't nothing else he can do, anyway. . ."

"Well . . ."

In the ensuing weeks, while Julius learned his new trade, the relations between Israel and the Roses became rigidly strained. True, Israel still continued to make his appearance on Friday nights for supper, and later to sip hot amber tea and discuss Muskenaw, but gradually the friction became obvious.

"What did you sell Mrs. VanderLawn to-day?" Israel would demand of the dark, moody Julius, who invariably sat silent at the table, absorbed in his food and his thoughts. "She used to be a good customer of mine till you got her away --" He tried to appear jocular, but the venom of his fury coarsened his voice. Curiously enough, Julius Wald was succeeding as a peddler.

"I didn't take her away. She prefers my goods to yours." Julius would reply in a cool, detached voice. "She says mine wears better --"

"You're a liar! She didn't say that!" Israel would spring up furiously. "You lie --"

Julius would smile vaguely and the old man would intervene:

"Hush, children! To-night is the Sabbath; don't talk business."

But often Julius had the last word: "At least, I don't infringe on the most important source of your business." And instinctively, everyone at the table would follow his deliberate glance out of the window, down the street to the row of unpainted wooden shacks adjacent to Dago Mike's Saloon.

The bantering quarrels came to a head, however, when Marie, one of the girls from Dago Mike's, stopped Julius Wald on the street. "Why don't you ever come to show us your things?" she demanded. "I hear they're very nice." The girls had been discussing the tall, goodlooking young Jew whom they had seen striding up Western Avenue with a canvas-covered pack on his shoulders. They desired to view him at closer range. "When will you be over?" Marie asked, smiling with blue eyes that held more than a hint of delicious promise.

Abstractedly, Julius stared at her. Then he nodded his head and walked away, leaving a bewildered and indignant young woman behind him. To salve her wounded vanity, Marie somewhat radically changed the story of the encounter when she related it to the girls that afternoon. And when Israel Challanty made the rounds of the row of wooden shacks the following morning, he was greeted with bantering threats that unless he reduced the price of his merchandise, they would all swerve their trade to Julius Wald.

"He's handsomer than you," Marie told him affectionately, placing a nipping kiss on his ear and slipping an imitation gold

bracelet on her arm. "Down with the prices, little Jew, or you'll lose our trade entirely!" with much good-natured laughter.

That evening, after a supper which he could hardly choke down, Israel Challanty braved the rage of a blinding storm to stumble to the house of Rose.

Fannie opened the door. Without brushing the snow from his checkered lumber jacket, Israel strode into the kitchen, where Rachel, Julius, and old Ben Rose were seated around the stove, drinking hot tea.

"Ah, Israel, it is cold out. You will warm yourself with a glass of tea, yes?" Rose greeted him affably.

Challanty disregarded the invitation. He strode up to Julius and knocked the tumbler of tea from his hand. The hot water spilled over Rachel's knees and she screamed with pain.

"I'll teach you, you *ganif*!" Challanty cried, his voice thick with fury, shaking his finger at the young man. "I'll show you how to take away my customers!" He showered a series of blows upon Julius' face and shoulders. Before Julius could defend himself, Ben Rose pulled Challanty away. He dragged the fuming little man to the back door, opened it, and flung him into the mad storm.

"Never again will you darken my door, you hear, *sheigetz*!" he warned.

That night, in one of the worst blizzards that upper Michigan had ever known, Rachel gave premature birth to a baby girl. They named the child Miriam, after old Rose's wife, and twenty-one years later, when she grew to smug, poised, and self-assured girlhood, she married Kopel, the first-born son of Israel Challanty.

III

Israel stared at the finely written sheet of paper in his hand. A letter from Bessie. He could picture her, tear-stained and sobbing, the child at her skirts, running to the *shamos* of the synagogue, who wrote letters for the major portion of the Jewish women having husbands in America -- wringing her hands, begging him to send word immediately.

Leibe, her father, was dead. Old Leibe, who drove the team of exhausted horses from Krinock to the neighboring villages. Instead of the eloquent appeal of the sexton in behalf of Bessie,

Israel saw long, winding roads that spun their courses through yellow wheat fields and brown huddled villages and black brooding forests. Sitting on the wagon, jerking the reins, ah -- the feeling of power it gave one to guide the horses on the path! Singing gayly, singing lustily, throwing kisses to the blond-haired peasant girls who worked with rolled-up sleeves and skirts in the smelly fields near the road. . . Coming home, tired and hungry, to a hot meal, and warm bed, and Bessie. . .

So -- old Leibe was dead. Dead. Laid out in his white shroud and wrapped in his prayer shawl, supplicating candles and wailing women at his head. Dead. Buried six feet under the ground. Dead. No more Leibe.

Bessie and the child were alone in Krinock. Alone in the wooden hut. The horses standing idle . . .

For some time now, he had been thinking of sending Bessie a ticket. Well, the letter was opportune. He would write Bessie to sell the house and the team. With the proceeds, she could buy her ticket, and have enough money left over for expenses until she reached Muskenaw. Then he would rent a small house, one of the new houses that were being erected near Western Avenue, and there he would have a whole room to himself, to store his goods.

Yes, it would be fine to have Bessie with him again. He was tired of eating by himself, cooking for himself. And now that he had quarreled with the Roses and missed their Friday night suppers, he felt more than ever the need of a home. And it would be nice to have the child. He must be two -- no, almost three -- now, Kopel. At first, Israel had feared that Bessie would not come to him -- after the incident on the Night of Atonement -- but upon the receipt of her letter, he went ahead with his plans. . .

He wrote to Bessie, giving her explicit directions as to the disposal of the house and the horses. He sent her the address of Henry Rabenstein's relatives on Broome Street in New York City. They would care for her and put her on the train to Muskenaw. She would have to change trains at Buffalo and Detroit, but she need not worry. The conductor would help her. In America everyone was polite to a woman, especially if she had a young child on her arm.

IV

In the eight weeks prior to Bessie's arrival in America, Israel exchanged numerous letters with Henry Rabenstein.

Rabenstein had sent for Sarah, the tall, brown-haired, soft-eyed girl-wife, whom he had left in Europe. They were living in a stuffy little room over the saloon where Henry worked as porter. Sarah was unhappy. Chicago bewildered her. She was afraid to venture out in the street alone. Even after two months of life in the city, she was still unaccustomed to its bustle, its confusion. The horse cars, the carriages, the tall buildings, the intricate streets, the seething crowds, all terrified her. She pleaded with Henry to leave the city -- to go to some village, similar to the place from which she had come, where she could spend the days in the open sunshine, working in a flower garden, and strolling through roads still unpaved and uncobbled, and virgin to the raping tread of a thousand feet.

Henry had saved up a hundred dollars. He wanted to bring Sarah to Muskenaw. Did Israel think this a feasible plan? Was there chance of procuring work of any kind in Muskenaw?

Yes, Israel wrote Henry in return, there was opportunity for him in Muskenaw. He might get a job in Dago Mike's. If not, he might open a small saloon himself. Why not? Who was there to stop him? Oh, he would find something to do, all right. By all means, he must come!

Since the advent of the Roses to Muskenaw, Israel had again become accustomed to living in the company of his own people; and now that he saw the Roses only by chance when he passed the house or met them on the street, he was lonesome. The instinctive bonds that tie one Jew to another had reasserted themselves. . . It would be nice to have Rabenstein and his wife in Muskenaw. Why, in time, they might build up a little Jewish community. And have a synagogue. Despite himself, Israel grinned at the notion of a synagogue on Western Avenue, opposite Dago Mike's and the row of unpainted wooden shacks. . .

V

DAGUERREOTYPE

I

Although he had not seen her for almost thirty-five months, Israel found Bessie hardly changed. She was still of the buttery plumpness which he had found so delectable in the first days of their marriage. True, her cheeks were devoid of color, but that defect he attributed to the long, fatiguing journey. Thank God, she looked strong and healthy. An ailing wife was a misfortune and a curse.

The child, Kopel, whom he had left a suckling in Bessie's arms, had grown to be quite a boy! A sturdy, thickset youngster, with enormous green eyes and an ivory pallor. He was quiet and obedient, except for a streak of anger that flared up with the fury of a volcano and died down -- at the sight of a leather strap in Israel's hand -- with the meekness of a lamb.

Israel used the leather tongs freely. Bessie's tears and pleadings were useless picks against the bedrock of his decision. "Israel, don't touch him," she cried. "Don't touch my child!"

Israel replied, "Ain't he my child, too, heh? You want he should be spoiled?" He forced the squirming and screaming boy across his knees. "You want he should grow up a bum, huh? There ain't enough bums in your family without him?"

Anticipating Bessie's arrival in Muskenaw, Israel had rented one of the new, wooden houses just off Western Avenue. It was a simple and rather crude structure, consisting of three rooms and a back shed on the ground floor and two rooms on the second floor. The walls had been whitewashed and then calcimined a sickly

green and febrile pink. The pine floors were deadened to a dull brown. The furniture, three wooden beds, several warped commodes, a huge table and six plain, slatbacked chairs, Israel had picked up an auction, cheaply.

Bessie had brought an ample quantity of bedding from the old country. Israel helped her arrange the two upstairs rooms, which they rented to four mill workers; the front room on the ground floor, they let to three of the lumber crew. One chamber Israel designated for their own sleeping quarters; the smallest room for the kitchen. The shed he cleaned thoroughly, then painted the walls, and used it as a storeroom for his merchandise.

When Israel was away, Kopel sometimes played in the storeroom. Once he upset a box of goods. When Israel came home, he so thoroughly punished the boy, that Kopel never ventured near the shed again without permission.

Every morning Bessie arose at dawn, for Israel left early to commence his peddling. After giving Israel breakfast, and packing his lunch in a small paper bag, she stole back to bed again, beside the flushed sleeping child, to drowse for a short hour, until the roomers rushed off to the saw mill and lumber camp. Then she made the beds and started her work for the day.

In the rear of the little wooden house she had planted a garden -- for to Bessie a house was not home unless there was an adjacent plot where she might plant seeds, coax tender blades of green through the dark, rich soil, tend the shoots carefully, weed them, nourish them, that they might grow quickly and unrestrainedly. . . She loved the soft earth -- it reminded her of the garden in the old country. . . How happy she had been then. . . Wistfully, Bessie realized that the new land had brought her husband gold, but had entirely overlooked her happiness. . .

Several hours in the garden, and then she awakened the child, dressed and fed him. Her day was burdened with housework, scrubbing the floors, washing Kopel's dresses and the bedclothes, preparing dinner for herself and the boy, rinsing the dishes, starting preparations for supper. The five men who slept in the Challanty home also ate the evening meal there, and Bessie spent most of her afternoons over the steaming stove, frying, boiling and

stewing dishes for them. Although she cooked an ample amount of food, Bessie was by no means wasteful, and every particle left over from the meal was put away for the next day's disposal.

Israel approved of Bessie's economy and commended it: "If you're careful, we'll get somewhere yet."

Less than a year after her arrival in Muskenaw, Bessie gave birth to another son, Leon, a healthy, blond baby with clear, blue eyes and fair skin.

During the period of her pregnancy, Bessie underwent considerable discomfort. Soon, however, she learned to become accustomed to plowing her way through a spell of dizziness. Above all, she hated showing her pain before Israel, whose jeers, at first goodnatured, had later changed to sharp, angry daggers.

"You ain't sick, you're lazy!" he would storm at her, when he reached the house to find that she had not yet prepared supper. "How long do you think the men will stay by us, if they come home tired and find nothing to eat, heh?"

So she had clenched her teeth and dragged her ungainly heaviness over to the stove, and had stood for what seemed to her as interminable hours before its blistering heat, wrenched with nausea, sickened to the pit of her being with the disgusting odor of cooking food.

Scarcely had she weaned the second boy, when she became conscious of the portending symptoms again. . .

It did not enter her mind to revolt. She accepted her lot meekly. Besides, she loved the children fiercely: mouse-haired, sturdy Kopel, who frolicked with the baby brother hilariously through the day and sobered into a mature and frightened silence when Israel came home at night, and the loud, fat, rollicking Leon. He was a healthy baby and he caused her little worry. During the day she set him out on the grass to play with a doll that she had fashioned out of bright rags, and cautioned Kopel, who was as conscientious as a dog, to watch over him. And since Leon gave her so little trouble, she wouldn't really mind another child. Perhaps it would be a girl. . .

The third child was a girl. A robust, dark-haired baby, whom they named Sophie after Israel's mother.

After the birth of Leon, Israel had invited the Roses to his home to celebrate the arrival of his second son, but they had quite aloofly disregarded his invitation, so when Sophie was born, he did not risk a second insult.

Although she herself was heavy with child, Sarah Rabenstein came to see Bessie every day, and cared for her as if they were of the same flesh and blood. She even brought a dainty little dress for the new baby, which she had embroidered with her own slim fingers and had been saving for the birth of her own child.

II

Acting on Challanty's advice, Henry Rabenstein had packed his few belongings, and together with his lovely wife, had exchanged the confusion of the city of Chicago for the simplicity of the village of Muskenaw.

Henry Rabenstein was short and slim. His straw colored hair matched the hue of his trim, yellow beard. His small, blue eyes twinkled merrily, an index to his fine sense of humor. Good-natured and acutely sensitive to the pain of others, he possessed real profundity. In the old country, his parents had come of a good stock, fine, educated Jews, who, though rich in learning and tradition, all lacked material wealth. Henry had spent the customary years under the care of a Hebrew teacher and had emerged from the lengthy ordeal an accomplished -- unless one probed too deeply -- scholar.

The generous sincerity that was the keynote to Henry's character reflected itself in his young wife's nature. A tall, thin, pretty girl, she too was a sensitive, good-natured creature. They were both proud, and although there were many days in which they went without food, no one in the village knew of it. "No one must know," they would whisper to each other, walking up the street, smiling serenely. They believed in keeping up appearances.

Arriving in Muskenaw, Henry and Sarah had rented a small room in a cheap hotel and Henry had gone in search of employment. The bartender in Dago Mike's had informed him curtly that

there was no work to be had. The saw mill was overflowing with help, and even the lumber company, to whom he had applied in desperation, required no more men.

His savings were decreasing at an ominously steady pace. One had to pay for the room every week and there was not a cheaper one to be had anywhere. One had to eat -- and Sarah was accustomed to fresh eggs and cream and delicate food. Of course, he, Henry, felt that he could live on anything, stale bread and water, if necessary, but Sarah -- Sarah mustn't want! Henry's entire thoughts centered around Sarah. She was the first woman he had loved, the only woman he was ever to love. In later years, his devotion to her and her reciprocation became a byword for marital fidelity in Muskenaw.

Although Israel was aware of Henry Rabenstein's plight, he tried to appear unconscious of it. What could he do? He barely made a living for himself -- And with a wife and two children to support, he couldn't really be expected to take out his last cent to help a mere stranger -- for, after all, Rabenstein was no flesh and blood of his. Rabenstein had asked his advice and he had answered the best he could. Surely, he couldn't be responsible if Henry found no work in Muskenaw! That was the chance he took in coming out. Hadn't he, Israel, taken the same chance? Didn't everybody take the same chance?

Finally, when Sarah lay weakly on the bed, no longer able to stifle the pain of hunger, Rabenstein walked desperately into Dago Mike's Saloon and addressed his words to Dago Mike himself.

"Please," he begged, "I've got to have a job. I'll do anything, anything!"

Michael Ryan, the huge, heavy-featured Irishman who was nicknamed Dago Mike because of his swarthiness, towered over the short, thin, pleading figure. "What th' hell you want? A job, huh? Well, ask the bartender." He turned away.

Rabenstein tugged his sleeve. "I asked him several months ago, and he didn't give me nothing. I can work hard, mister, I can do anything. Know how to mix drinks too -- any kind." His voice shrilled with nervousness. He must get something to do.

Anything. He must! A picture haunted him -- Sarah, thin and undernourished, moaning on the bed.

"I'm sat'sfied with my man. Don't need another bartender."

"Please, mister, I'll do anything. I must get a job. You understand, mister, I must! My wife is sick . . . hungry . . ." It cost him untold effort to utter those last words -- he had cast his pride aside.

Sarah must have food . . . first a glass of hot milk. . . "Anything, mister, I'll do anything." He forced his misted eyes up to the dark-browed face of the Irishman.

". . . Well, I guess I c'n use another man around here. Hey, Jim!" Dago Mike Ryan called to the bartender, "put this young fellow to work tomorrow. Oh, let him help around. . . And say, give him a week's pay in advance. . . And a little of that whisky to take home with him."

Hot milk with a flavor of whisky. A glass of hot milk for Sarah.

III

Like a healthy, well-nourished infant, Muskenaw grew at a leisurely, but none the less steady, pace. New wooden buildings were erected to house grocery stores and general stores and clothing stores. Streets were laid out, among them Muskenaw Avenue, three squares to the west of Western Avenue, a wide thoroughfare that was limited only to residences. The National Lumberman's Bank, which had previously been harbored in a room of the Northern Lumber Company's offices, now moved into its own building: a one-story, red-brick box with a flat roof. At the opening ceremony, the mayor of Muskenaw, Horace Stackley -- the young vice-president and general manager of the Northern Lumber Company -- and other men of prominence, spoke earnestly on the future of Muskenaw. A furniture factory moved into the village, and employed several hundreds of out-of-town workmen, who swarmed into Muskenaw with their families.

Hand in hand, pace in pace, with Muskenaw's progress, on swift, sure feet strode Israel Challanty. He enlarged his peddling route outside of Muskenaw. He was the first to visit the wives of the newcomers to the village. He worked indefatigably, arising at

dawn every morning and returning home late each night. Of course, he still had Julius Wald for a competitor, but as Wald had been ailing and was not strong enough to maintain a large route, Israel no longer fretted about him. In many instances, he undersold Julius, thus gaining new customers. Of course, since he bought in large quantities and received his goods directly from Chicago, he could easily afford to sell merchandise at a cheaper price than Wald who bought in small lots in Grand Rapids.

Israel worked hard and made money. Bessie worked hard and gave Israel the money she collected from the boarders. And Israel saved the money. "Now I can buy a horse and buggy," he determined, "and do more business around the farms."

And, although by that time, he could afford to keep her in leisure, Bessie still kept boarders. Hunkies and Swedes and Dagos from the saw mill and the furniture factory. Besides cooking their meals and making their beds, for small sums of money she also washed their clothes.

Twice a week, in passing the Challanty house, one could see two lines of damp clothes, sheets, pillowcases, towels, heavy horse blankets, children's dresses, blue shirts, and long, awkward masculine underwear, fluttering in the breeze -- and two small boys and a crawling baby girl playing hide-and-go-seek among the lines, their grubby paws accidentally marking the whiteness of the laundered garments, ceasing their sport only at a shrill admonition from the house, "don't dirty the wash. . ."

Within another year, Israel had accumulated enough money to make a first payment on a large, two-story house that had been erected at the lower end of Western Avenue, near Ottowa Street. Without a word, the National Lumberman's Bank covered his mortgage. They knew that Challanty was all right.

This new building Israel converted into a rooming house, renting chambers for the night and tactfully asking no questions of transient visitors. And in this house, too, Bessie made the beds and carried the slops and washed the bedclothes. Sometimes, in cleaning up a room in the morning, she found a trinket -- a veil or a gaudy pin or a hair ornament set with synthetic brilliants -- that the lady of the evening had carelessly left behind.

IV

Flaming autumns died at the height of their triumph into harsh, invincible winters. Icy winters conceived delicate, frosty springs. Silver springs bloomed into full, silent, green summers. And the months sauntered leisurely on for Muskenaw, for Ben Rose and his motherless family and ailing, troubled son-in-law; for Henry and Sarah Rabenstein struggling hard to make ends meet, yet happy in each other's love; for the family of Challanty, working hard, hard, saving money, growing rich!

The lust for money, for gold -- the gold of the dream of his youth -- had reawakened and grown powerfully strong in the veins of Israel Challanty, and by the very force of his own will, he imbued the same desire into the heart of his wife -- the slightly bewildered, greatly overworked, and lovingly docile Bessie.

VI

A BUILDER BUILDS

I

At the dawn of the twentieth century, Muskenaw was already one of the most flourishing towns in upper Michigan. Boasting of a population of twenty thousand, consisting for the most part of the workers of the various factories and their families, Muskenaw took its place among the industrious towns that were springing up like mushrooms around Grand Rapids, the furniture center of North America, and Detroit, where a thin, earnest young mechanic had already commenced the manufacture of a queer contraption, a horseless carriage.

No longer was Western Avenue a sandy road dotted with a few wooden shacks and one red brick building. Structures of heavy wood and brick and cement-block commenced a line of stiff array, shoulder to shoulder, from Ottowa Street through upper Muskenaw, stopping short of the placidly marcelled sheet of aquamarine that was Lake Michigan. New stores, housing every known variety of merchandise, opened daily; three new banks; a red sandstone hotel, *The Occidental*, furnished with an imposing portico, crowded the thoroughfare; and just a block to the west of the main street loomed the new gray stone library, gift of the lumber magnate, Horace Stackley; the Catholic church, a huge, imposing edifice, the most costly in Muskenaw; and two smaller Protestant houses of worship.

Dago Mike Ryan had moved the quarters of his saloon to the lower section of the town, and there, also by the stern edict of the

town council, assisted by the Temperance Society, the gay painted ladies of the row of unpainted wooden shacks were segregated.

Along Muskenaw Avenue, the Terrace, Sanford and Walnut Streets, large wooden and stone houses, built after the ostentatious and intricate ugliness of the early century architecture, loomed among imposing stretches of smooth green lawns and neatly clipped hedges. Even the poorer factory workers lived in neat little houses and kept gardens.

With the death of the lumber industry, all lawlessness had perished in Muskenaw. With the departure of the lumber crews for an upstate camp, and all of the workers in the saw mill, which had shut down, the village took on an aspect of incredible sobriety. The newcomers to Muskenaw, who trailed in with the coming of the furniture factories, were for the most part honest, thrifty, hard-working, and law-abiding foreigners. From Chicago and Detroit arrived a variety of prospectors -- men who opened stores and markets and did thriving business. And with the increase in population and prosperity, Muskenaw sobered into conventional respectability.

II

Horace Stackley, president of the Northern Lumber Company, president of the Stackley National Bank, silent partner in the Caste-Stackley Piano Company, owner of practically all of the land west of Muskenaw Avenue, had wandered into Michigan shortly after the Civil War, in which he had served as a private and engaged actively in battle for the North, his original home being in upper New York state.

He was a tall, powerfully built man, agile despite his bulk, with a deep, resonant voice, a commanding presence and an honesty of purpose, which, backed by a pair of really power fists, won him the respect of the lumberjacks, and later, their successors. He was restless and energetic, possessed with an enormous capacity for work and a shrewd business ability.

After the war, he returned to his native village, to his father's blacksmith shop. Daily, he grew more restless and irritable. Even

marriage with a pliant, lovable and admiring little wren of a girl failed to satisfy the heavy unease of his full blood. Finally, after three months of marriage, he left his wife, Clara, with her parents, and wandered out to Ohio and from there into Michigan. From Detroit he trotted upstate, until he reached Muskenaw. There, for lack of money to travel further, and because he was attracted to the beauty of the stretch of tall, dark, patriarchal trees that sent their pungent odor over the shimmering blue glass of Lake Michigan, he applied at the tiny office of the Northern Lumber Company, a young and troubled firm, for a job.

After working in the camp for eight weeks, butchering powerful old trees, he dropped in to see Charles Buck, the wavering and vacillating manager of the Northern Lumber Company. He was direct and explicit.

"I've served an apprenticeship in cutting down trees," he began tersely. "Now I want a chance at real work. I've got some plans. Listen. . ."

The lure of the timberlands had surged into his blood and stirred into a whirlpool of visions. He saw great possibilities in the Muskenaw camp; there was a real future in it. Although he had wandered among most of the camps in the state, he had never seen timber ranking finer than that of this region. Then, too, by building a dam at lower end of Muskenaw River -- a swift, forceful stream of water -- Grand Rapids, furniture capital of the country, was easily accessible for shipment of logs. And this means of transportation would be much cheaper than the railroad, which the Northern Lumber was using. Why, he could take that business in hand, he assured the officers, without knowing a thing about logs, and triple its profits in a year.

That was exactly what he did. Within a year, he became assistant manager of the Northern Lumber Company. At the close of the century, this lumber organization was reckoned the biggest, the richest, and the most powerful in the state. And Horace Stackley, son of a village blacksmith, self-educated, and married to a sweet, ignorant and unattractive housemaid, was unanimously elected its president.

At that time, the Stackley home, on Jefferson Street, was the

showplace of Muskenaw. An enormous, lonely building set in a square park, which was encased with a tall, formidable iron fence, painted dark green to match the shutters and trimmings of the elaborate mansion. Although Stackley seldom invited anyone to visit his home, each night he ordered every room of the house to be brilliantly lit, and from the distance the numerous windows shone like giddy fireflies dancing in a large, dark, mysterious garden. . .

Many years later, after the death of Stackley, his adopted son, who spent most of his time either in California or in Europe, let the old house go at auction -- and those same windows looked with blind and stony derision upon the new purchaser, who converted it into a high-class boarding house, for genteel folks, consisting mostly of the teachers of the Muskenaw High and the Stackley Manual Training Schools.

And the ghosts of the powerful old lumberman and his pathetic, unassuming little wife and his beautiful, arrogant, and bejeweled mistress looked down with wonder and amazement at the enormous, high-ceilinged rooms that were now housing middle-aged and repressed women and unprepossessing and shabby men, who taught mathematics and languages and history in the schools that Horace Stackley had erected -- in lieu of a son of his flesh and blood -- as a monument to carry on his heritage and tradition.

III

When, at the birth of the twentieth century, Horace Stackley, having accumulated one of the largest personal fortunes of any lumber magnate, retired from active business, he looked around for a new interest.

Women held little fascination for him, either in his youth or maturity. Until he had grown to power, he remained faithful to his wife, although he had never professed to love her. Work: creating wealth, fame, power out of his own hands -- this invariably had interested him more than mere sensual pleasures.

Even when Mrs. Amelia Rancan, a full-blown, middle-aged beauty, became his mistress, he seldom showed great enthusiasm for her. In fact, when he was engrossed in a new business deal, he

often stayed away from her for weeks at a time. When she showed her annoyance by pouting sweetly and reprimanding him in honeyed tones, he would silence her with a new trinket, sparkling with diamonds. Mrs. Rancan had a passion for diamonds. . .

And then, one brisk morning as he was walking up Western Avenue to visit his bank, it came to him! Like a vision! To build schools and parks and libraries and hospitals! To educate the children of the ignorant foreigners! To teach them to grow up worthy citizens of the community and the state and the country! -- To follow the example he set them -- That was the idea! To educate the coming generations of Muskenaw!

Having centered his heart on the task of illuminating the minds and molding the characters of the youth of Muskenaw -- and incidentally, their parents, too, if possible -- Stackley set to work enthusiastically upon his plans. First, he sent to Chicago for architects, and when they arrived, two serious young men thoroughly convinced that they knew all there was to know about their business, he spent hours and days in conference with them, watching them execute their plans, and constantly offering suggestions.

Two blocks west of the Occidental Hotel, in the neighborhood that was rapidly becoming the best residential section of the town, Stackley chose a site, a large, square field, which he designated as the park. With meticulous care, the plot of earth was laid out, in a conventional geometric design which the architects copied from a staid and well-known garden in the East.

For each corner of the park, Stackley ordered statues: an enormous stone image of Lincoln, slouching with awkward benevolence on a dark stone bench; McKinley, recently assassinated, staring with graven sternness at the huge trunks of the century-old trees; General Grant, stocky, belligerent, ferocious; and other men of fame who stood high in Stackley's estimation.

In the exact center of the park loomed a tall, spiral column of stone, topped by a buxom maid of liberty modeled in the act of striding triumphantly into space. The massive base of this inspiring figure was splotched with figures of the heroes of the

Revolution and was protected by a low, iron railing. Sometimes, the daring boys climbed over it, and crawled up to the heroic figures, only to be chased off quickly by the caretakers of the park.

Interspersed among the smooth, well-kept verdure, gemmed with patches of red and yellow tulips, nests of violet pansies, and beds of crimson rose bushes, were dark cannons, underneath each a pile of immovable cannon balls. When the band concerts were inaugurated, and the green benches in the park were overflowing on concert nights, young men and the more daring, giggling girls would sit on the slippery smoothness of the cannon necks . . . and years later, these cannons were used as a background for snapshots of pretty girls taken by amateur photographers. . .

To the west, opposite the park, Stackley erected a public school, a huge, gray stone building with ample room for a playground. And to the north of the park, the library, a fine stone structure with many elaborate turrets and stained windows.

Then the high school, further up on Jefferson Avenue, near his own home, swelling a whole block with its red sandstone ostentation, and across the street, the Stackley Manual Training School, which in later years was accorded the distinction of being considered one of the finest manual training schools in the country. Stackley believed in teaching girls housework and boys a manual trade, and so the rebellious and perspiring young men and women learned to construct furniture and to print and to cook and to sew. Believing, also, that young people need ample physical exercise, Stackley arranged for a large athletic field, and thereby earned the unwavering and undying gratitude of every schoolboy and his descendants in the town of Muskenaw.

Yes, Horace Stackley was building up Muskenaw! Schools, libraries, hospitals, parks. And Muskenaw appreciated it! As Stackley walked down Western Avenue, a fine, commanding, and powerful figure clothed in plain black broadcloth, the admiring gaze of the populace centered upon him. Respectfully, men raised their hats. Women smirked and bowed deeply. Little girls curtsied as they had been taught. Horace Stackley, greatest philanthropist in Michigan!

Down in his heart Stackley gloried in this display of gratitude.

He was doing his best, for this, his town, showing it the right path to knowledge and culture, and the town understood and appreciated his generosity! Ah, that was good! He would show the world! He would make Muskenaw the finest town in the middle west, in the whole country! . . .

Just before the Stackley Hospital was opened, Horace Stackley and his wife, Clara, while driving home from church one Sunday noon in their carriage, were thrown from their seats when their spirited horses were uncontrollably frightened by the sight of an automobile. Horace Stackley was killed instantly. His wife died three days later.

For seven mournful days, every building in Muskenaw was draped in black; and when the Stackley Hospital was finally opened, the ceremony was simple and unassuming -- a fitting threnody for the greatest man that Muskenaw was ever to know.

A year later on the day that the large, life-size oil portraits of Horace Stackley and his wife, Clara, were to be unveiled in the entrance of the Stackley Public Library, a tired, painted old woman fell asleep, fingering a leather bag of diamonds. She was too weary to open her eyes again. . . When, on the following morning, her maid entered the bedroom, she found a picture of Horace Stackley lying on the floor, beside the elaborately carved mahogany bed, covered with scattered jewels, all of which were diamonds worth a king's ransom. . .

IV

One by one, from the cosmopolitan ghettos of the world, they came on, in search of fortune and a home where they might live unmolested -- the thin, wavering line of Jews who settled in Muskenaw.

Harry Mandal, an easy-going, good-natured young man, who had been a butcher in the old country, wandered in through Canada, and became a cattle dealer. Jerry Goldfarb, a short, blond, rotund idealist, opened a tiny grocery, failed in the business, apprenticed himself to a shoe cobbler, and later opened a shoe repair store of his own. Ben Goldberger, huge, crude,

animal, established a clothing store and prospered. These, and a few others, mostly men who had met with failure elsewhere, came to Muskenaw to try again.

Ben Rose no longer cobbled shoes.

His sons, Ike and Abe, having labored for several years in the saw mill, had accumulated a tidy sum of money and had invested it in a business with Rachel's husband, Julius Wald, who because of ill health had been compelled to give up peddling. A clothing store -- "Gent's Furnishings" -- the sign read -- and they were making a fair living. . . Of course, they worked hard, but they didn't mind that! Weren't they working for themselves? . . .

On a buying trip in Chicago, Ike had met and married a nice girl and they had settled down to a life of peace and work.

Abe had not married. Women did not attract him greatly, and he was quite content to live at home with his father, and his sister, Fannie, who had not yet found a mate. . . Abe was a bit worried about Fannie. She was a good girl, a fine housekeeper and cook, but not attractive physically, and men failed to find her interesting. Of course, there weren't many Jewish young men in Muskenaw, and those who did live there couldn't appreciate Fannie's many fine qualities. . . It was too bad he couldn't take her to Chicago to live. Muskenaw was no place for an unmarried girl. . .

V

Henry Rabenstein labored hard to earn his butterless bread.

Finally, after staying with Dago Mike for ten months, working around the saloon, scrubbing the floor, cleaning spittoons, doing all the drudge work, silently accepting the harsh words of the bartender, the painted harlots, and any drunkards who happened to be around, Henry revolted and threw up his job.

"I couldn't help it," he explained to Sarah. "I couldn't stand that place another minute. God, the filth, the cheapness, the rottenness of it! Taking orders from frowsy women and drunks"...

"Don't worry, darling," Sarah comforted him, smoothing the frown from his forehead and patting his clenched hands.

Upon the advice of Ben Rose, with whom the Rabensteins had become very friendly, Henry tried peddling. Junk. Old clothes. Bottles.

At first, Henry had found it horribly trying to walk from house to house, knocking on back doors, asking in sing-song drone: "Any junk, lady? Any old clothes, bottles, iron . . ." But it was better than working in Dago Mike's. . . Cleaner and more respectable. . .

Within a year he was able to buy a horse and wagon, which enabled him to visit the farms outside of Muskenaw.

Arising at crisp, smoky, purple dawn. . . A bite of breakfast, steaming coffee. . . Good-by to Sarah, sleepy-eyed, a sprigged, gray flannel wrapper over her nightdress. . . Harnessing the red mare and starting out for the day. . . Sunrise. . . Gorgeous, colors that flamed across the silver ripples of Muskenaw Lake. . . So poignant a scene that it brought a queer sob of exultation to his throat. . . He must win! He must! For Sarah! . . . Long days through the heat of blistering sun. . . Piling junk, old stoves, bottles, rags, anything, everything, on the wagon. . . For Sarah. . . Coming home at night. . . Frosted moonlight that blessed the tops of pungent pine trees. . . Long, still, silent roads. . . Lonely song of whippoorwill. . . Fragrant smell of drying hay in the fields. . . Rumbling murmur of incoming trains rising to a shrill crescendo of whistles jagged the quiet of the night. . . Coming home. . . Heavy load on wagon. . . Ah, coming home to Sarah. . .

In the summer months when the junk business was slow, Henry rode to the farms and bought wagonloads of produce -- cucumbers, potatoes, corn, string beans, peas, lettuce, tomatoes -- and peddled in the wide streets spotted with large, ostentatious, and extremely ugly houses. Henry was industrious and worked hard, and soon he commenced to earn a decent living for Sarah and the children who were arriving with commendable regularity to the home of the Rabensteins.

VI

The house of Challanty prospered.

Israel was rapidly accumulating the disks of yellow metal which he had so covered in his youth.

And the things they bought for him! Land -- plots of land on upper Western Avenue, which he believed, with a keen foresight, would eventually become the stronghold of all business interests. Houses -- houses to let to factory workers and rooms to furnish and rent by the month, or the week, or the night. A store -- a large, two-story brick building on lower Western Avenue, just above Ottowa Street.

On the ground floor he broke up the partitions and converted the small stores into one large one. He filled racks with men's suits and coats and women's dresses in all sizes and descriptions, shelves with shirts and underwear, cases with ties and mufflers, boxes with hats and shoes. He established the largest and most imposing men's and women's furnishings store in the town.

He still maintained his route, though to a far lesser degree than previously, retaining only the best of his old customers. However, those people who had traded with him for years did not stop their patronage with the cessation of his route, but came into Muskenaw to purchase at his store. On Saturday afternoons, the curb in front of the Challanty Clothing Company was lined up with teams, and the store was mobbed with gawky, awkward men and women who bought and bought and bought. . .

Although she no longer cooked for them, Bessie still kept roomers, and took charge of the rooming house on Western Avenue.

And, of course, now that Israel had purchased the building for his store, the second floor apartments were converted into bedrooms and rented out to transient visitors. . . and no questions asked. . . Bessie still washed sheets and pillowcases and aired the blankets and made the beds, but now she had an old woman to assist her -- Goldie, thin and withered, with a head of glorious white hair, who was slightly mad and worked hard as a driven slave for a meal and fifty cents a day.

Through the passing years, Bessie had presented Israel with more sons and daughters: Gregory, dark, thin, sullen; Teresa, a tiny thing, with the sharp, inquisitive nose and near-set eyes of a ferret; Danny, genial, grinning and happy-go-lucky; Barnett, Danny's counterpart, but more charming and impudent; Mattie, with dark, lovely eyes, a long, pinched nose, and a beautiful voice; and Asher, a fair-haired, blue-eyed and gentle baby.

VII

Israel worked hard himself, never ceasing for a moment, and he believed that everyone should possess his capacity and zest for labor.

As soon as they were old enough, he took Kopel and Leon with him on his route, teaching them the art of selling as he knew it. When he opened the store, the two boys came in to straighten it up, to sweep and dust before running off to school, and they returned immediately after classes, remaining there until late in the evening.

The other children helped Bessie in the house, Sophie and Teresa with the washings, and Mattie, scarcely higher than the sink, with the dishes. The younger boys chopped wood, ran errands, looked after the horse, and weeded the garden.

Bessie no longer had time for her garden. Sometimes, as she stood over a tub of steaming clothes, rubbing stained sheets up and down, up and down, on the washboard, her shoulders moving with heavy, mechanical rhythm, she recalled the smell of the fresh soil in the spring, when the tender blades of green shot up through the rich earth, and her heart ached. . .

She worked hard, not for the sake of gold -- Bessie had never handled enough money to have a real appreciation, or even realization of its value -- but because Israel told her to work and a wife must obey her husband. . . But why? Why this constant rushing around, making beds, washing clothes, preparing meals, sending the children off to school, putting them to bed, suckling the newest baby, mending, then washing again? Why? Why? Why?

. . .Ah, it would be good to dig her fingers in the rich soil again! Ah, it would be good to nurse the tender young green things into full ripeness. . . Ah, it would be good to have leisure again to work in her neglected garden! . . .Ah, the smell of the earth in the spring of the year. . .

When the town council inaugurated band concerts in Stackley Park, the younger Challanty boys popped corn and sold it to the crowds. Danny and Barnett each had a tiny shoe stand, and after selling the corn, they went around to the people sitting on the green benches and the dark, slippery cannons, and shrilled: "Shine yer shoes! Shine yer shoes! Penny a shine!"

Gregory refused to shine shoes.

"I won't!" He defied his father openly, although he proved quite willing to do any other tasks Israel Challanty imposed upon him. And although Israel beat him cruelly, and although the boy's body shook with fear whenever his father looked at him, let alone approached him with leather thongs in upraised hand, he clung to his resolution. "I won't shine other people's shoes," he shouted, taking courage from his own voice. "I won't! I won't!" He screamed with pain, but his sobs were mingled with a resolute, "I won't shine anybody's shoes!"

Gregory was a queer boy.

VII

WESTERN AVENUE

I

"Yes, I'm investing in National Motors. A small amount. And you?" Israel Challanty asked his friend, Henry Rabenstein.

They were standing in the door of the Challanty Clothing Company, the interior of which was packed with grimy, perspiring crowds. Israel Challanty was conducting one of his famous sales. . . From his position in the doorway, he watched with an eagle eye the maneuvers of the clerks, hired for the day, and his sons, engulfed in a whirlpool of sweating, jabbering men and women.

"Yes, I'm going to buy several hundred shares, too," Rabenstein replied. "Everyone is buying. The Roses -- Mandal --"

"Let's go down and see how the buildings are coming along," Challanty suggested.

They strolled down Western Avenue in the blazing heat, two stubby figures, Israel like a rotund and livid pumpkin, Henry, a thin, fair stalk of corn. Reaching Ottowa Street they turned up toward Muskenaw Lake, on the edge of which a new concern called the National Motor Company was erecting a huge factory.

The scene seethed with life and activity. On the bare, skeleton outline of the buildings, the workmen were crawling around or scaling up and down with the agility of monkeys. The stifling air was bursting with the clang of engines, the reverberating hammer beats of the workmen, the whistles of the steam shovels. The voices of the curious and unkempt men who stood near by, discussing the new factory and automobiles in general, accenting

their arguments with expectorations of tobacco juice, were drowned into insignificance in the pandemonium of mechanical noise.

"They's putting up big buildings, all right," Israel noted with satisfaction. "That means good business for us, right on Western Avenue."

He was right. With the coming of the new factory, at first a branch, and later the main stem of the National Motor Company, manufacturers of engines for motor cars, the business in Muskenaw increased to a pleasing degree. Hundreds of laborers from Detroit, Chicago, and even Grand Rapids swarmed into the town, worked, saved enough money to bring their families into Muskenaw, rented wooden cottages which the banks and the real estate companies were erecting at a justifiable speed, and settled down to a life of work and play in the growing town.

When the factory was being built, the corporation, in need of money, launched thirty thousand dollars worth of shares among citizens of Muskenaw. To give the people of the town an opportunity to invest in one of the biggest enterprises of the century was the object, the officers said.

But despite their enthusiasm, most of the population of Muskenaw failed to respond. For the most part, the people were still skeptical of the merit and value of the horseless carriage, and not even the large imposing buildings that were looming up and the enthusiastic promises of the corporation and the newspaper accounts that the sales of the motor cars were growing by leaps and bounds, could convince them of the feasibility of investing good, hard-earned money in a queer contraption that moved without the aid of horses.

Among the heavy investors were Israel Challanty, who was convinced of the safety of the investment, not from what he heard and read, but because of a "hunch" of his own -- Henry Rabenstein, who believed what he read in the newspapers and what Israel told him -- Ben Rose's sons, who had a small sum of money laid aside and were still young and impetuous enough to gamble on it -- though it did seem a "sure fire thing" -- and many other small speculators who purchased five and ten shares apiece.

Although no one knew it, Challanty was by far the heaviest investor. At the time when National Motors was floated, he had been putting money aside for the purchase of another house; instead he used this money for stock, feeling intuitively that it was a safe and possibly an extremely profitable investment.

Henry Rabenstein, too, had invested heavily in National Motors. Henry was no longer poor. He now owned a large junk shop on upper Western Avenue, adjacent to the dock. He owned, also, two teams of strong horses and three sturdy wagons. He lived in a comfortable gray house on lower Muskenaw Avenue, which boasted of a front porch, and a garden and a lawn, which his children tended with solicitous care.

His good fortune commenced in this manner:

After he had been peddling for three years -- junk in the winter; ripe, rich fruit and vegetables in the summer -- the saw mill, which had closed down some five years previously, was to be sold at auction. A thousand dollars could buy it easily, the price including both building and machinery. Henry felt that if he could acquire it, he would be able to sell the salvaged lumber for a decent sum -- and the machinery, alone, cut up, would bring him three or four times the amount originally invested.

But where to get the money? A thousand dollars! It might as well have been a million! From Israel Challanty? Henry laughed. Israel was a friend only when there was no money involved. Ben Rose's sons? Well, they had just opened up a new business and needed every penny of their savings. Who then? Where to go? Whom to ask? And he must have that money! The saw mill would make him! Rich -- ah, to be rich! To Henry, wealth was a means to an end! Happiness for Sarah. A nice house -- for Sarah and the children. New clothes -- pretty, frivolous things, jewelry and furs -- for Sarah! A hired girl to help Sarah with the work -- He must have money!

The day of the auction of the saw mill was approaching nearer and nearer. Still no money. This was a year before Horace Stackley died so tragically. In a last, desperate attempt Henry called upon the president of the Stackley National Bank. Henry did not expect

favorable results, but he was resolved to try. The only thing Stackley could do would be to refuse him.

"A thousand dollars, heh?" Horace Stackley, sitting in his large, expensively furnished office, exclaimed. "Why should we give you a thousand dollars?"

"Because I want to buy the saw mill and salvage it."

"But a thousand dollars without security of any kind!"

Henry was silent.

"This ain't a charity institution, you know, it's a bank." Stackley laughed at his little joke and Rabenstein joined in half-heartedly.

"I have nothing to give you for security, only my word --" Henry turned to leave. He realized the hopelessness of securing a loan. He had been a fool to come; Stackley was right. A bank certainly wasn't a charitable institution. If they were to give loans to anyone who came in, with nothing to show for security, except a word of honor -- Henry laid his hand on the door knob.

"Guess you're right, Mr. Stackley. Good day."

"Just a minute there --" Stackley chuckled.

Henry turned back politely, his fair face dull with disappointment.

"Of course, I'm right." Stackley lit a huge black cigar and puffed away. In his somber black broadcloth suit, with a flowing tie, he looked picturesquely out of place in the modern and conventional office. "Of course, I'm right," he repeated. "But sometimes I like to gamble. I'll take your word for security. Here's your thousand dollars and good luck to you!"

That thousand dollars was the foundation for Henry Rabenstein's fortune. The salvaged saw mill brought him in three times as much as he had anticipated and he repaid Stackley with gratitude. Never did he forget Stackley's kindness and in later years, he was fond of retelling the incident to all strangers who would listen to him.

II

"We are enough among ourselves now to be able to hire a Rabbi. It's a shame, I tell you, a town like this without a Rabbi --

What will our children grow up to be? What will they know of Judaism?"

It was Saturday noon. A cool, crisp autumnal day. The Jews of Muskenaw were assembled in the hall on Pine Street that served them as a synagogue. The services were ended and the women had already sauntered out, leaving the men to fold up their prayer shawls, put away the prayer books, and walk leisurely home for dinner. Rabenstein was addressing Israel Challanty and Harry Mandal.

"Another month and the Holy Days will be here. And we have no Rabbi. The man we hired from Chicago to conduct the services last year was terrible. An ignoramus. He hardly knew how to conduct the services. What will we do this year?"

"Get another man," Challanty suggested. "I'll help him out with the services." Challanty recalled his youth and his old dream of becoming a cantor. . .

"But we should have a Rabbi the whole year round. It's a shame, I tell you! Our children growing up *goyim*. They don't know how to pray, they don't know a word of Hebrew. We have to send to Grand Rapids or Chicago for kosher meat and chickens. I tell you we ought to have a Rabbi here all the time!"

"But how?" Challanty inquired. "There ain't enough families here. We can't afford a Rabbi yet. Maybe in a coupla years --"

"Yes, we can!" Rabenstein interrupted. "We have eleven families. Most of us have children who must have a Hebrew education! All of us need meat and chickens regularly. And we've got to have a man for the High Holy Days, as well as for the Sabbath --" Here Challanty frowned. He was accustomed to conducting the Sabbath services and disliked the thought of being deprived of that pleasure. "If each family contributes a dollar a week, we can get a man."

Sure." Harry Mandal said in his hoarse, whiskey voice. "For ten dollars a week you can get a good Rabbi."

In the earlier years, before they had rented a hall on Pine Street, Sarah Rabenstein, who came of a pious and learned family, offered a room of her tiny home for the Sabbath services. Between themselves, the Jews had collected enough money to purchase a

scroll, which Henry ordered from Chicago, and which they kept in the Rabenstein home. Later, as the number of Jewish families increased, they organized a little community, electing Rabenstein president, Mandal vice-president, Challanty secretary and treasurer. For a nominal sum they hired a large room over a store, on Pine Street. Here they conducted the weekly services -- with Israel Challanty, in imperfect pronunciation and rich, mellow voice, fishy green eyes cast heavenward, chanting the services -- and also the High Holy Day services, as well as any festivals and meetings that occurred during the year.

Both Challanty and Rabenstein were active workers in the synagogue. Unfortunately their enthusiasm did not infect Ben Rose and his family, who would have nothing to do with the activities of Congregation B'Nai Yishuran, and seldom attended services, except on the Day of Atonement.

Rose was a German Jew. All the other inhabitants of Muskenaw were Polish Jews. Now that they had worked themselves up and amounted to something financially, Ben Rose's children, instinctive snobs, built up a barrier. They couldn't stand the greasy Polacks. Challanty and Mandal and Rothblatt -- Bahh -- Of course, Rabenstein and his wife weren't bad. Nicer than the average run of Polish Jews. But still --

The contempt which the German Jew felt for the Polish Jew was greater than the contempt the gentile had for them both.

III

The new Rabbi's name was Boris Mason.

He was a tall, serious young man, with deep-set, fiery eyes, a straight, classical nose, thin, sensitive lips which he covered with a reddish mustache and short beard, a bald head, beautiful hands and a passion for religion.

With his wife, a tall, handsome woman, whose common sense proved an excellent counterbalance for his artistic temperament, he lived in a small, brown house on Ottowa Street. They had one child, a spoiled, sickly little girl, Ruth.

The congregation was very much satisfied with their first Rabbi.

On the Sabbath and Holy Days, he read the Scroll in a clear, sweet voice, with meticulous and expressive eloquence that warmed their hearts. He was tactful, too, and having discovered that Israel Challanty, treasurer of the congregation, found much pleasure in conducting the services on the Sabbath, he gave that gentleman free rein.

And Israel Challanty, looking more than once with speculating eyes on the large, beautifully modeled busts of the Rabbi's wife, was pleased with the Rabbi, and made it a custom to invite him to his new home, the enormous yellow house on Walnut Street, after the services on Saturday noon, to make *Kiddish* over a glass of excellent wine, and to taste Bessie's gefilte fish.

IV

Having passed through the period of awkward adolescence, Muskenaw shot up like a husky corn and milk fed youth. Its once-cloudless skies were overcast with heavy smoke belched from the smokestacks of a multitude of factories. Its placid lake was constantly plowed by the huge, heavily laden steamers of the Five Star Line, going to and from Chicago and Milwaukee. Factories -- factories pouring out carloads of office furniture; manufacturing cabinets, chairs, tables, pianos, phonographs, billiard tables, motor engines. Stores -- hives of stores, catering to every known variety of merchandise, clothes for men, women and children, food, household accessories, furniture; even a red-painted establishment that sold all of its wares for five and ten cents. Banks -- the oldest bank in the town, the conservative National Lumberman's, the Stackley National Bank, the Morris Savings Bank, the smaller and less pretentious institutions that were stuffed with the savings of the Hunkies and Swedes and Wops and Micks who sweated in the factories. Churches -- the simple, unostentatious Protestant Church, serene in a cloak of white paint, the red brick Episcopalian, the somber gray Presbyterian, the magnificent sandstone Catholic Cathedral, the little Jewish synagogue in a shabby hall over a store on Pine Street. The schools -- the Stackley Public School, the Horace Mann, the Muskenaw

High and Stackley Manual Training School. The fine Park. The hospitals -- the Stackley hospital and the hospital of the Convent of the Sacred Heart. The homes -- the large, gray stone and red brick, well-kept houses on Muskenaw Avenue and Sanford and Walnut Streets, and the poorer little bungalows on the outskirts. All neat and basking in the sun like satisfied, well fed alley cats. Pleasures -- the amusement park of Lake Michigan, a pathetic miscarriage of Coney Island, a theater, supporting the burden of a local stock company, three houses that showed the new pictures that moved! Buggy rides through long, shaded roads! Swimming in the coolness of Lake Michigan or the smaller lakes that surrounded Muskenaw! Saloons on every corner. Dago Mike's place. And of course, the unpainted wooden houses that were an eye-sore to the ministers and reformers of the town. . . Life was good and the town was growing! A Chamber of Commerce. Parades on holidays, carrying floats that advertised local stores. Trade in Muskenaw! Life, activity, business, work, play -- ah, Muskenaw was growing! And growing on! On! On! To be a big city! Already one of the most flourishing -- certainly one of the busiest towns in the middle west. Fifty thousand population by 1915. A hundred thousand by 1925. And growing on! What other town in Michigan could boast of such factories? Workers flooding the streets at early dawn and night, so thick the crowds that you had to walk in the gutter to make progress. What other town in Michigan could boast of such schools, such hospitals, such a library, such a park, such business? Saturday -- shopping day -- every store on Western Avenue overcrowded. Mobbed. Wagons of the farmers hugging the curb. Babble of voices, haggling, bickering. The sweep of land, once so vast, silent, mysterious, that gazed out on the brooding waters of Lake Michigan, transformed into such bustle, such activity, such life! Factories. Offices. Stores. National Motors building additions to their plant. Stock going up, up, up! High school football team winning first state victory. Played on Stackley Field. Ah, why wasn't old Horace Stackley alive to gloat over the victory that put his town on the map athletically? . . . His town. The busiest town in the middle west! And growing, growing on! And with its mushroom growth, the rise of Israel Challanty, Henry Rabenstein,

Harry Mandal, the Roses. You had to give them credit. Those Jews were workers. They liked money, but they certainly helped put the town on its feet. Show them a little appreciation! Elect them to office in the Chamber of Commerce! For a bit of honor they would work harder. Especially that little junk dealer, Rabenstein. . . Fine town, Muskenaw. Couldn't be beat! Filled with workers, hard workers, those who labored in the factories and those who ran the stores and offices. Wanted to amount to something, and worked hard to get there. Weren't afraid! They had the real stuff in 'em! Pioneers! Grow on, town of Muskenaw, grow on -- with your factories that turn out cabinets, chairs, tables, pianos, phonographs, billiard tables, motor engines; with your stores, your offices, your churches; with your schools, your parks, your hospitals; with your homes; with your conglomerations of all creeds and races, the Wops, and the Hunkies, and the Micks, and the Swedes, and the Dutchmen, and the Jews! Grow on into a turbulent, pulsating city -- you've got the goods! -- town of Muskenaw!

Book Two

VIII

PORTRAIT OF A GOOD MAN

I

His first emotion was fear. At least, that was the first one he could remember. Fear of the obese man who towered over him, a strap of leather thongs in his upraised hand. The man whom his tired mother called "Israel" and whom he had been taught to call Pa.

At first, Kopel hated the strap. When he saw Pa approaching, leather thongs in hand, he would run to Ma and bury his face in her greasy, wet apron and scream shrilly with anticipated fear. But after a while he got used to it, and it didn't scare him any more to feel the narrow, razor-sharp strips of hide bury themselves into his soft flesh. Of course, it hurt -- hurt like fury -- but after you got accustomed to the pain, it wasn't so bad. You felt kind of good, afterwards. . .

But although his dread of the leather strap eventually left him, his fear of the fat man whom he called Pa never did. Even in later years, through adolescence and manhood, he often found himself trembling uncontrollably at the approach of his father. A harsh word from Israel and he was miserable for the rest of the day. And although he raged inwardly and vowed constantly that some day he would tell the old man where to get off -- he'd get even with him all right! -- Meanwhile he was plastically amenable to Israel's suggestions that were invariably commands.

Often at night, Kopel used to lie awake and think up dire punishments for the old man. He used to make believe he was an Indian, and that he captured Pa and tied him to a tree, and tortured him. Sometimes, he burned the toes of his feet or branded

him or threatened to scalp him. And the old man got down on his knees, crying, *crying,* and pleaded for his freedom. And Kopel said:

''Do you rem'mber all the times you whipped me, huh? An' yelled at me an' called me names like 'bum' and 'bastard'? Well, you can just say you're sorry for everythin' you did, an' you can promise to God you'll never do it again, an' then maybe I'll think of lettin' you go. See? Otherwise --'' He shrugged his shoulders, looked meaningly at the faggots and played with his tomahawk; and the implication sent a shudder through the old man's body, and he promised everything. . .

Unlike Leon, Kopel was a plodder. And conscientious. If he were given a task to perform, he would stick to it until it was entirely finished, even if it took hours and hours.

Leon, of course, was different. Leon worked quickly, superficially. He seemed to accomplish a lot in no time. For example, if Leon were told to sweep and dust the store, he would be finished in a half hour. And the following day, when it was Kopel's turn to do the work, it would take him two hours or more, for he went over all the showcases and shelves that were invisible to the customers -- and which were heavy with the accumulation of yesterday's dust. . . Leon could think up a lot of interesting ways to fix up a display, but Kopel could never dress a window unless some one stood back of him and told him what to put in it.

As he grew older, his father depended upon him in the store more than any of the other boys. Israel was sure that Kopel, fearing and obeying him even in manhood, stole less than the others. . .

Kopel was short and stockily built. His broad shoulders and his long, powerful arms, which always hung loosely, awkwardly, at his sides, were too large for the rest of his body. His hair was a thick, straight, rust brown. His yellowish face seemed too small to hold his heavy features -- the enormous green eyes, the huge nose, and the loose, well-cut lips. As he grew older, the condition of his nearsighted eyes grew worse -- they bulged out rather horribly -- and Kopel was compelled to wear thick, ugly glasses and consult oculists constantly to avoid blindness. . .

He was never a scholar. Because of the condition of his eyes, he could read little. Besides, he had no time for books. He was in the store before and immediately after school, and remained there until late at night. And then, his eyes ached too much even to do his arithmetic or spelling.

Sometimes, Leon did his arithmetic for him. Leon was younger and in a lower class, but he was awfully smart and could do figures in his head! Kopel himself progressed no further than the eighth grade.

He did not get along well with the other students. At recess, the boys never came up to talk to him or asked him to play with them. He couldn't play ball, of course, because of his nearsightedness, and he didn't own a jackknife, but still, he thought wistfully, it would have been kind of pleasant to have the other fellows come up and speak to him.

When he attempted to mingle with the others, they made him feel, in no uncertain terms, the intruder. Their laughter and conversation died with obvious quickness, when he came toward them. The boys knew that despite his stockiness and long arms, he was no good at fighting, and sometimes they used to pick quarrels with him and torment him. Kopel would stand by helplessly, trying to ward off the blows the best he could and screaming for Leon.

The fellows were afraid of Leon. Leon could fight anybody -- and would! In the winter, when the snow lay thick and heavy on the ground, the boys used to throw hard snowballs at Kopel, if he walked home alone. They stung. Sometimes they almost broke his glasses.

But when Leon was with him, they didn't dare. Leon could aim too well, himself. Kopel always waited for Leon after school. He was dependent on Leon, but he hated to show it. It was kind of funny, an older brother depending on a younger one for protection. Gosh, why wasn't he strong and quick like Leon, and brave? Why did his heart sink to the pit of his stomach and nauseate him when the fellows started chasing him? . . .

He supposed that he loved Leon. He didn't know for sure. He felt better, safer, more certain of himself when Leon was around. And yet, he hated Leon, too, for his irrevocable dependency. . .

His mother he adored. She was the one harbor of safety in the stormy and nightmarish youth of his life. As he grew older, she became less demonstrative -- not the way she was when he and Leon were the only babies, and she used to kiss and hug them breathless, and sit in the garden with them, and show them how to weed the vegetables -- No, since the other kids came, and she was so busy washing and cooking and cleaning, she didn't have much time for him. But often, after he and Leon came home from the store at night, dead tired, she used to have a hot supper waiting for them, and before they went to bed, she used to kiss them -- hard. Nice, wet, sucking kisses that Kopel loved. . .

But he wished that Ma wasn't so -- well -- dirty about herself. Her face never looked quite clean and her dress was always greasy and the house was no longer as spotless as it used to be. Kopel wanted his mother to look like the ladies who lived on Muskenaw Avenue and who wore immaculate starched things and always looked neat and cool. "But how can I wear clean things in the kitchen?" Bessie expostulated when the boy pleaded with her. "I ain't got time to dress up --"

Although he hated his father, with an intensity that sometimes frightened him, he never showed his antagonism openly. He realized that Israel held the upper hand. And that in order to get anywhere, he would have to give in to his father. So he worked on, meekly, subserviently, his heart festered with the sore of hatred and the subconscious desire for revenge.

II

After he left school, Kopel Challanty spent all of his time in the clothing store which his father had opened to supplement his peddling route, and which had grown into a well-established and profitable business.

His day commenced at five in the morning, when he arose, washed hastily, dressed quickly, gulped down some breakfast that his mother, already up for an hour, had prepared for him, and hurried off to the store.

Generally the streets, in the cool, misty dawn, were alive with the echoes of footsteps of laborers speeding to work, so Kopel was not afraid to walk alone.

At the store, he found his father already making up his pack for the particular day's route. Israel still peddled a few hours a day, for despite the fact that he was needed constantly at the store, he was reluctant to give up his best farm customers.

After his parent had left, not before showering numerous orders upon his shoulders, Kopel commenced raising the shades, sweeping and dusting. It was funny, how dirty the store got overnight! As if some one had been using it in their absence. . . Maybe some one had! Geez! Kopel drew in his breath sharply and peered, with broom in upraised hand as weapon, into all the dark corners -- A sigh of relief. Anyway, it was kind of lonesome staying in the big, silent store alone until Leon came, at seven.

Leon slept until six-thirty now, for he had to stay up late at night doing home work. Already Leon was at high school. He was great at learning things out of books!

When Leon arrived, they opened the boxes of merchandise that came in on the night boat from Chicago. The boys liked opening goods. It was great fun seeing the new things that had been ordered.

"Look, Kopel, ain't this a swell suit?" Leon held up a black-and-white checked garment that would eventually garnish the dark, oily handsomeness of a Wop at the Motor Works. "An' these ties -- lookit this red one -- an' this striped one -- Geez! Do you think the ol' man would know if I took one?"

"Better not now," Kopel cautioned. "Wait'll he checks 'em up. Then you can help yourself to any one you want."

"I'd like that red tie. Geez, wouldn't I look classy in it, though? Huh, Kopel?" Leon leaned confidentially across the huge, wooden box. "You know, Kope, there's a new teacher at school," he whispered, "French class. Some pip, honest! Say, wouldn't I like that red tie, though, huh?"

After Leon hurried off to high school, Kopel hung up the newly arrived garments in neat rows, laid all the ties in the showcases, and stacked the cardboard boxes on the shelves. He waited on

stray customers until Israel returned, and then hurried home for lunch. In the afternoon, business was generally brisk, and Israel and the boys were kept going until late at night.

As he participated in the Sabbath services at the little synagogue on Pine Street, Israel did not come to the store on Saturday mornings, so Kopel and Leon opened up, taking young Gregory along with them to fold up merchandise in case they were rushed.

Kopel was glad that his father did not force him to attend the synagogue. He preferred working in the store to visiting the wooden hall on Pine Street, where all mature Jews, wrapped in prayer shawls, chanted with uneven and discordant unison words which were foreign to his understanding. Of course, he believed in God, and since he turned thirteen he fasted on the Day of Atonement, and he ate only unleavened bread on the Passover, but still, he didn't see much to this religious business. . . Once, on Passover, he had a piece of candy in his possession. Experimentally, he put it to his lips and nibbled it. Nothing happened to him. He ate the whole piece, wondering what his parents would say if they discovered he had violated Passover. . . From that incident he came to the conclusion that it didn't hurt you to break a commandment of your religion, nor were you apt to be punished for it, so long as no mortal knew about it.

At sixteen, Kopel suddenly became conscious of clothes. Leon had always liked nice things, and not a week passed but what he helped himself to a pique shirt or a striped tie or a new cap, but Kopel, although neat and clean, wore the plainest and cheapest garments in the store.

"Geez!" Leon would expostulate. "Why don't you wear somethin' decent? The ol' man won't know if you take a better shirt and tie, and Ma won't tell."

"This is good enough," Kopel would answer. "These cheap shirts wash nicer and always look cleaner than the better ones, anyway," Kopel had a passion for cleanliness.

His first desire to be well-dressed was born as the direct result of a visit paid the Challanty store by a salesman of a Chicago suit manufacturer. As the man leaned nonchalantly against a showcase

and discussed prices with Israel Challanty, Kopel stood by, with a sudden, very obvious flash of admiration in his eyes. Never before had he seen such poise, such ease, such elegance! The way the drummer lit his cigar and gesticulated grandly with it! His diamond ring! His light, striped suit, and silk shirt and stiff collar and bright tie, and soft, felt hat! His oiled mustache! The carnation in his lapel! His fawn-colored gloves!

Kopel was overwhelmed with a sudden admiration and envy. To look like this man! To possess such ease, such poise! To lean nonchalantly against a showcase, puffing a huge, black cigar! Oh, to resemble the salesman from Chicago!

From that day he became a fop.

Secretly, he learned to smoke -- the hayseed cigarettes with which the boys experimented when they gathered in a stable rendezvous, and which, previously, he had scorned to touch. His first cigarette did not agree with him, and that evening, he could hardly look at food. When his mother urged him to eat and he declined, she thought him ill and threatened him with a dose of castor oil. Hearing this, Kopel mustered up enough courage to swallow as much food as he could, with after effects identical with those of his first smoke. But the second cigarette wasn't bad, and the third and the fourth . . .

In the mornings, at the store, after his father had departed and Leon had rushed off to school, Kopel practiced smoking -- leaning with earnest nonchalance against a showcase, and scrutinizing his reflection in the mirror until he perfected his new role.

Then his new clothes. At first without restraint. Anything he could filch from the store. The brightest ties. The gaudiest shirts. The gayest caps. The most incredible suspenders. Clothes became his passion. He lived, dreamed new suits, ties, hats. He commenced saving his meager allowance for a diamond ring and stick pin.

Gradually, however, the bright clothes subsided and Kopel began to learn the art of discrimination. He scrutinized the dress of each drummer from Chicago or Detroit. When he entered an office or bank, he noticed each individual's garments. He made comparisons; he eyed every man with a keen, critical glance.

And in time, he learned that a shell pink shirt and a red tie were not in keeping; that loud checked suits were not worn by nice people; that men of importance and good taste did not wear diamonds. . . Before he was twenty, Kopel Challanty was undoubtedly the best-dressed man in Muskenaw, and he took great pride in his reputation.

Whenever Israel noticed that Kopel was wearing a new garment, he cursed and raved, but although the young man stood in fear of his parent's fury, he was stanchly adamant where his clothes were concerned. And because he was a good salesman, a conscientious worker, and more to be trusted than the other sons, Israel gradually subsided in his abuses.

After the store closed at ten o'clock in the evening, Kopel was too tired to go out, although sometimes the fellows who worked in the National Motors and traded in Challanty's used to invite him down to Dago Mike's for a drink and a game of cards and -- here they would wink and nudge each other lewdly. Kopel never accompanied them. He hurried home, ate, and went to bed.

Sundays, Israel Challanty kept the store open until twelve at noon, so that some of his choice customers could drop in. At one o'clock in the afternoon, Kopel used to dress in his smart suit and well-matched accessories and take a walk on Western Avenue.

Everyone walked on Western Avenue early Sunday afternoon. The women in their best clothes. The men in their best clothes. The children in their best clothes that had once been clean. On Sunday afternoon Western Avenue was the promenade of Muskenaw. You met everyone you knew there.

Kopel walked alone. He was dressed in his nicest clothes. At every step, he would glance approvingly in a window at his fashionable reflection. He nodded graciously to his acquaintances, for the most part customers of the store. He strode along at an even, regular gait, his long, thick arms swinging loosely, admiring himself and basking in the admiration of others. He only wished that Leon was here to see him. But Leon was off for a tramp in the country on Sundays. Leon liked walking in the country. Kopel didn't. He preferred strolling on Western Avenue, clothed in his best suit, nonchalantly smoking a cigar. That was the life! Yessir!

Sometimes the fellows who traded in the store would stop him:

"Hello, Challanty!"

"Hellowww, there!"

"Fine day, ain't it?"

"Yes, if it doesn't end up by raining."

"Oh, I guess it won't."

"Well, I hope not."

"Nice suit you got on, Challanty --"

"Yesss . . ." With eager complacence.

"Geeez -- now why can't I get an outfit like that when I come in?"

"Well, I have all my things tailor-made in Chicago."

"Is that so!"

"But come in to see me." Green eyes patronizing. "And I'll see if we can't fix you up with something like this --"

"That's great! I'll be in."

"Yes --" drawlingly. "Um -- yes --"

"Well, I guess I'll be gettin' along. Everybody out for a walk to-day, huh?"

"Yes . . . so it seems."

"Well, g'by, Challanty."

"*Good*-by." Resuming his stroll.

Of his family, Kopel loved only his mother. And in a half-hearted fashion, Leon. The others he barely noticed. Except to demand that they make less noise and to wish that Ma kept them clean.

Sophie, he detested. She was a mean little skunk. Tricky and underhanded. And Teresa took right after her. Two of a kind. He hoped they wouldn't teach the kid, Mattie, their ideas. Always off in a corner together, whispering and giggling. Teresa's eyes reminded him of a rat's. The baby, Asher, wasn't bad; a quiet, pretty kid. He was always by himself; didn't seem to like anybody. Only Greg. Gregory was the awfullest liar and queerest kid Kopel ever heard of. . . He certainly could tell the biggest whoppers -- and sometimes you almost believed him. There was something funny about Greg. Maybe it was his eyes. A queer blue, they were,

never looking quite the same. He didn't talk much, but when he did -- what lies! Geez, Ma ought to try to break him of that habit! It wasn't right for a kid to grow up that way. . . Danny and Barnett, he didn't mind much. They were good fellows, full of the old Harry, always up to some deviltry, but they weren't mean and they didn't lie -- at least, not half so much as Gregory. . . Geez, what funny stories that kid could tell -- and with such a serious and earnest expression that you weren't sure but what he believed them himself. . .

So his life ran on smoothly, vacantly, until his twenty-second birthday.

Then Kopel fell in love.

III

Kopel had always liked girls.

Even at school, when he was an awkward and ugly boy, he used to sit and stare at the girls, speculating on the shape of their bodies beneath the full, voluminous skirts and wondering how it would feel to touch their cheeks and soft, frizzed hair. However, he was too shy even to speak to them.

Later, when he commenced working at the store all day, the fellows used to invite him down to Dago Mike's and the houses that were segregated off lower Western Avenue. He refused their invitations abruptly, without giving excuses. He wouldn't have minded going down for a drink maybe -- although the fiery amber stuff invariably choked him -- or try his luck at cards just for fun -- although he had a prudish revulsion against gambling -- but the girls -- He was ashamed to tell the fellows that he didn't know anything about women. Besides, he had a vague, subconscious aversion toward the Red Lights. It wasn't nice. Suppose he became infected with a terrible disease! Or fell in love with one of the girls! And suppose some one should see him there --

Of the Challanty family, Kopel was the most conventional. He had a constant fear of doing the wrong thing, of being criticized, of being different from nice people. He admired enormously what

he considered "breeding." He was invariably immaculate, and nagged his family into being decently and cleanly dressed.

If, on coming home at night, he found the living room upset and untidy, he worked himself up into a frenzy.

"You shouldn't let the kids play in the front room, Ma!" He expostulated to Bessie, grown gray-haired and wrinkled over the inevitable tub of clothes or pile of garments to be mended. "Heavens! Suppose some one comes to visit you and finds the house so dirty! What will they think of you, huh? And how they would talk -- Why don't you make the kids stay in the kitchen?"

"Don't scold them, Kopel," Bessie answered. "Children don't like to play in one room; they like running around. After supper, I'll clean up the front room again --"

"But you work hard enough as it is, Ma, without cleaning rooms at night. And if you wouldn't let them dirty up the room --"

"Oh, leave them be, Kopel, they don't have much fun --"

At the table, Kopel often reset the plates and knives and forks. (Assiduously, he had watched the waiters of the Occidental Hotel place the dinner service until he learned to emulate them.) He insisted that the boys put on their coats and together with the younger children wash and brush up, before they ate. Israel called him crazy, berated him soundly, and purposely sat down to the table in shirt sleeves, but Kopel clung tenaciously to his ideas.

"You kids shut up, or you'll eat in the kitchen," he threatened the younger children when they set up a clamor. "You've got to behave at the table. Act like nice people."

It was this desire, amounting to a passion, for mingling with nice people that first attracted Kopel to Miriam - daughter of Julius Wald, granddaughter of Ben Rose.

The Roses were nice people.

Since Ike and Abe had opened the clothing store and were well on the road to prosperity, Ben Rose had ceased cobbling shoes. They had all moved into a large, brown house on Muskenaw Avenue -- old Rose, his two sons, Fannie, Rachel and her husband, Julius Wald.

The Roses were among the first families in Muskenaw to keep a hired girl. The Roses were among the first to possess an auto-

mobile. The Roses went to Grand Rapids whenever a famous actor or orchestra made appearance in the furniture city. In short, with the accumulation of wealth, the Roses learned very rapidly how to live well.

When Ike Rose married a Chicago girl and brought her back to Muskenaw, they rented a house next to his father's. Ike's wife, Ida, had mixed with the nice people of Chicago and she knew a lot about entertaining. Soon her teas and dinners were the talk of Muskenaw, still unaccustomed to social activities. The Muskenaw *Chronicle* carried detailed stories of her affairs on its newly inaugurated society page.

The Roses were classed as the nicest Jews in Muskenaw, the Rabensteins following them closely in prestige, the Challantys very much at the foot of the ladder. The Challantys were never invited to the Rose home.

From a distance Kopel had often admired Miriam, whom he considered very attractive. He used to see her walking on Western Avenue on Sunday afternoons, chaperoned by her aunt Fannie, but he could never summon up the courage to approach her. He wondered if she ever noticed him -- probably wasn't aware of his existence, he thought bitterly. Sometimes, at night, he used to walk past the Rose home, when it was brilliantly lighted, and stare in the windows at the brightly clad women and conventionally clad men, chatting and dancing together. A dart of envy pierced his body. Oh, to be in there, with those charming people, mixing with them freely, hearing them call him "Kopel" and seeing them admire his clothes. . .

He met Miriam in the dusk of a frosty winter's day, as he was rushing home to supper. His heart began pounding rapidly; this was the first occasion on which he had ever seen her alone. Here was his opportunity! He overtook her.

"You shouldn't be out so late alone, Miss Wald."

She looked at him gravely. Indirectly, she had always known him, but had never spoken to him. He was the oldest Challanty boy. The one who dressed so beautifully.

"I'm going home now," she answered in a sweet though aloof

voice. "I have been visiting a girl friend and didn't realize it was so late."

"May I see you to your door?" His heart was galloping. He was talking, actually talking, with Miriam Wald, whose aunt gave such fine parties and whose people were such nice people. And she was answering him!

They walked together down Muskenaw Avenue. Kopel was stricken into an awed silence. He wished his acquaintances could see him now. He was strolling along Muskenaw Avenue with one of the Roses! And she was polite, even gracious to him!

As they reached her door, she thanked him graciously. Kopel was entranced. She had such a sweet face. "Could I see you sometimes, maybe?" he requested hopefully.

Her reply killed the hope in his heart. "I'll ask Mamma," she had answered.

Ask her mother! Kopel grew sick with disappointment. Then, of course, he would never be allowed to see her. Kopel could picture Mrs. Wald saying, "One of the Challantys? My dear, how could you . . ."

But Kopel did not know that his father was rated as the richest Jew in Muskenaw. And that eligible young men were scarce. And that Miriam was already twenty-one. "Should have been married long ago," her grandfather grumbled. "No Jewish virgin should remain single after she is sixteen." And that, although Miriam had been taken to Chicago on several visits, none of them had proved fertile. Somehow, the young men of the city did not take to Miriam. And she was such a good girl, too!

Undoubtedly, Miriam was a good girl.

In appearance, she was tall and angular, sadly lacking in the curves that were so essential for the beauty of the early twentieth century girl. However, a dressmaker from Chicago, adept at padding, had helped her gain a certain, appealing rotundity in spots, when she was fully dressed. She possessed soft, dark eyes, a bit stupid like those of a calf, an insignificant nose, and a wide, plastic mouth. Her front teeth were spread rather far apart and when she talked -- in a grave, lisping voice -- her pink tongue signaled through the crevices.

Kopel was the first man who had ever offered to walk home with her, without being urged, and she fell in love with him instantly. It didn't matter really that his eyes were hidden by thick glasses and that his nose was big. He had such a nice mouth -- she wondered how it would feel to have his lips touch hers! -- Miriam buried her flushed face in her pillow, in trembling ecstasy. Then she reprimanded herself. Nice girls, her mother would have cautioned her, do not think of such unladylike things!

After a courtship which consisted of calling on Miriam Sunday afternoons and sitting stiffly in the parlor talking to her parents; of taking her for an occasional buggy ride through the cool, plumed lanes of North Muskenaw -- he would put his arm chastely around her waist and they would both look ashamed and self-conscious and would giggle a bit -- and of escorting her proudly to her aunt Ida's parties, Miriam and Kopel became engaged.

At moments Kopel could not believe it had all really happened. Miriam, Miriam Wald, was in love with him! And he was going to marry her and become related to the Roses! Become an intimate member of the family, in fact. How wonderful! He went about in a daze, hardly daring to breathe, for fear he would awaken and find it all a dream. . .

Israel Challanty was not pleased with his son's engagement, but still, young people had to marry and it might as well be Rose's granddaughter as anyone else. . . He remembered the night that Miriam was born . . . his quarrel with Julius Wald. . . How long ago -- like a vague dream, now. . . Perhaps Ben Rose would become friends with him again. . . But now he would have to begin paying Kopel a real salary. That was terrible. With such big overhead expenses, he couldn't possibly afford the money. . .

With too ostentatious reluctance, the Roses at last consented to mate with the Challantys. Within a year of their meeting and first conversation, Miriam Wald and Kopel Challanty were married by a German Rabbi who had been brought down from Grand Rapids for the occasion.

IX

NICE PEOPLE

I

After a two-weeks honeymoon in Chicago, where Miriam proudly showed off her newly acquired husband to all of her feminine acquaintances, the young couple returned to Muskenaw and settled down to the quiet routine of married life.

They moved into a small, five-room house on Muskenaw Avenue, the use of which Israel Challanty, who owned the property, gave them gratis. They furnished the house mostly from wedding gifts, for both the Roses and the Challantys had many friends who remembered their children. The bedroom and dining room suites Ike Rose purchased in Chicago at wholesale prices.

They seemed to be very happy.

Miriam followed her aunt Ida's footsteps. She was an excellent cook and within a short time her dinners became as well known as her aunt's. Soon a friendly competition sprang up between them. And from morning until night, Miriam was constantly planning new dishes, new cakes, new drinks, and arranging elaborate parties for the coming days.

Of course, entertaining, and entertaining lavishly, was an expensive pastime. The young couple had only Kopel's salary to depend on, but Kopel said, "The expense be hanged!" He would manage the money end, somehow (Thank God, the old man was often out of the store in the afternoons . . .) and his darling Miriam could go right on inviting as many people as she liked to dinner. It was great fun, really, and he enjoyed coming home to find the house in festive gayety and the table beautifully decorated with

immaculate linen and sparkling glass and shining silver. With a bowl of yellow roses in the exact center of the table. Just like the dining rooms in the big Chicago hotels. He liked to sit at the head of the long board, surrounded with gossiping men and women, and carve the meat and smile at his young wife, flushed with the success of her affair, serving the vegetables. He liked pouring drinks for the men and having them clap him heartily on the back and wink at him.

"How's married life agreeing with you, Challanty?"

"Oh, just fine!" Gazing proudly at Miriam, in bright satin dress with many flounces, his diamond ring sparkling on her finger. "Just fine, sir . . ."

Much amused and easy laughter.

A year after their marriage, Miriam gave birth to her first child, a boy. Kopel was overwhelmed with his fatherhood. He helped himself more liberally at the store, and presented Miriam with a lavish gift, a lavalliere with a real diamond and two pearls.

Miriam did not nurse the child; she had no milk.

Exactly thirteen months after the birth of the first baby, Miriam was confined again. Another boy. Kopel was in the seventh heaven. Two sons! Two little fellows to call him "father"; to carry on his name. His boys! How marvelous, how incredibly wonderful it all was!

After the birth of her second child, Miriam had a heart-to-heart talk with her physician and learned how to "take care of herself." Two babies were quite enough for her. Just a nice, respectable family.

Kopel took his children seriously. He commenced laying away a small sum weekly for their future college careers. His boys were going to amount to something. They wouldn't have to clerk in a store. No sir! They would be doctors or lawyers or dentists. Kopel stood in awe of titles.

For the first five years of their marriage, Kopel was placidly happy.

A nice home, two sturdy sons, a sweet wife -- what more could any man wish for?

A nice house on Muskenaw Avenue, smokeless white, with

green shutters, surrounded by a smooth plot of verdue splotched with patches of vivid flowers; the interior nicely furnished with a brown leather living suite and a mahogany dining room and velvet drapes and lace curtains and bright rugs. Always immaculate. Miriam never allowed the children to dirty up the house, as his own brothers and sisters used to do. The little boys played on the back porch or in the yard. They never pulled up flowers or mussed the porch with mud pies. Miriam saw to that. They were always dressed cleanly when Kopel came home, so he could lift them up high, enjoying their chuckles of delight, and kiss them heartily. And Miriam herself invariably looked fresh and appealing. The table was set and supper ready. . . Kopel always tried to be prompt in coming home at night. Miriam was sweet and amiable, but it did annoy her to keep supper waiting. . . Yes, Kopel had come up in the world! The best little wife -- and one of the Roses, too! -- two lovely sons, a home, a job, and a reputation in the community as one of its fine, serious young men. What more could any man desire?

Miriam continued entertaining and Kopel gladly paid the bills. It certainly was worth any money to have people flocking to his home, to have Mrs. Kopel Challanty's dinner described in the Muskenaw *Chronicle*, to be included in the functions to which all nice people were invited. . .

Kopel was contented. And as the years rolled on, and he became accustomed to Miriam and the boys and the charming home and affairs and being included among nice people, he never questioned his happiness. He took it all for granted, along with his wife and family and the ostentatious dinner parties, and his job in his father's clothing store.

II

He saw her for the first time when she came in to pay a bill for some blue denim work shirts which her father had bought.

Her name was Serenka.

Her yellow hair, bobbed in a day when few women wore short locks, was slashed across the forehead a fraction above the straight

black brows, and hung almost to her shoulders like a bright, dazzling helmet of gold. Her eyes were mottled green, the lids black-lashed. Her skin was of dark peach. Her slender body with its short, rich curves sent men into voluptuous daydreams.

Her father was one of the Hunkies who worked on the night shift at the National Motor Works. She lived with her parents and innumerable brothers and sisters in a shabby house at the far end of Pine Street.

Obviously, she was not a nice girl. No girl whose father worked in a factory and who waited on tables in the restaurant which Dago Mike had opened next to his saloon could be a nice girl. She inspired erotic desires in every man who danced with her -- after she had finished waiting on tables for the night -- but she never satisfied them . . . entirely. . .

Kopel thought he had never seen anyone so vibrantly, so intensely, so thrillingly alive! Her vivacity, her ready, spontaneous laughter! When she smiled at him, as she paid her bill and waited for a receipt, he felt his blood course madly through his veins.

He wanted to sing and dance and shout with joy. It was so easy to fall in with the healthy, glowing mood of this girl. . .

He forced himself to speak to her coldly, casually.

"We're having some lovely summer dresses in soon." So long as he kept to business he felt that he was on safe ground.

"Yeh?" She smiled again, infectiously. With genuine friendliness. Kopel could not resist the desire to grin back.

"Yes, some real pretty things. Why don't you come in?"

"Maybe I will."

"Yes, do! Ask for me, an' maybe we'll be able to find something real nice for you."

"Yeh? All right." She sauntered out of the store, swinging her hips, displaying her white-toothed vivacious smile.

A week later, she returned. Kopel, attending another customer, spied her entering the door. Nervously, with undue speed, he rushed through his sale, fearing that Leon or Danny would come up to her and she would not wait for him. And he so wanted to speak to her, to look at her again! Despite himself, he had thought of her so often during the last week. . .

She greeted him with a generous smile.

"I've got something nice to show you," he said, looking at her gravely. Their eyes met and they both grinned. It was as if they were sharing a charming little secret and neither was quite certain what it was all about.

He showed her some new dresses, satins and foulards, beruffled and flaunting many flounces. After much deliberation she picked out a red and white polka dot with a lace collar.

"I like that, but maybe it's too much money . . ." She looked wistfully from the dress to Kopel Challanty.

"Oh, I guess we'll manage that, all right!"

They agreed on a price that actually was below cost. Serenka was to take the dress on credit and make weekly payments. "I'll come in every Saturday night," she smiled.

Eagerly Kopel agreed.

After she left, he shook himself. What the devil was the matter with him? Was he crazy? Selling a dress like that, one of the best in the store, below cost, and on credit! What if the old man should hear about it? What the hell was the matter with him anyway? He didn't seem to be able to keep his senses when that kid came around. Well, when she came in to pay her bill next Saturday night, he wouldn't go near her. He'd tell Leon to take care of her.

During the week he was irritable and restless. The children annoyed him. Miriam's hurt, reproachful gaze drove him frantic. At her Friday night dinner, he was grouchy and hardly cordial to the guests. Everybody asked him if he were feeling all right. They weren't accustomed to a sullen and moody Kopel. . .

By the time Serenka came in on Saturday night, Kopel had worked himself up to a nervous frenzy. His face was pale. His collar had wilted. He was soaked in a cold perspiration. He wouldn't go near that girl! He'd call Leon!

Yet, when he saw her coming through the door, he rushed forward eagerly to greet her. How cool and lovely she looked! What hair! What eyes!

The hour being late, there were few customers in the store, and she stayed and chatted with him for a while. He couldn't keep his

eyes off her face. He clenched his hands to keep them from touching her body.

"We have some new ribbons in. Pretty colors. How'd you like some? A red one, maybe?"

"Oh, I'd love it. I'm crazee about ribbons!" She turned her mottled green eyes upon him. "But I ain't got the money . . ."

"Oh, that's all right. We'll make it a little present to you. You're a good customer."

"Gee, Mister Challanty, you're awful nice to me . . ."

He walked to the door with her, and watched her swing down the street, her hips shaking rhythmically.

"Who's the little blonde?" Kopel wheeled around quickly to find Leon behind him.

"Just a customer." Casually.

"Yeh?" Leon chuckled. He threw his arm around Kopel's shoulders. "Well, old boy, watch your step. You'd be wax in that baby's hands. Besides, don't forget Miriam."

Kopel shuddered. Leon was right. Miriam. Miriam and her family -- the Roses.

Was he mad? He put his hands to his weary, throbbing temples. He was a married man. He had two grown boys. He was a respectable citizen. Everyone pointed him out as a model young man. God, was a strain of his father's blood cropping up in him? Couldn't he be faithful to Miriam? Heaven knew, she was the finest little woman that ever lived. He ought to be ashamed of himself. The girl was probably a harlot -- why did the thought send a roaring flush of heat through his blood? -- he might unwittingly get tangled up with her -- scandal -- blackmail -- God in Heaven, he *must* cease this foolishness! What would the Roses say if they found out -- "Well, what can you expect? After all he's a son of old Challanty . . . Yes . . ." Nodding of heads . . . Innuendoes that were true of Israel . . . Whispers. . .

The following Saturday evening he was resolute. Tonight would be the last time he would see her. After this, Leon would take care of her.

She was late. Kopel grew tense with anxiety. Maybe she wasn't coming at all. She had never been late before. He paced around

the store aimlessly, nervously. But finally at eleven o'clock, just as they were getting ready to close the store, she strolled in.

"I couldn't come till I got my pay," she explained.

After she took her receipt she lingered on. "Coming down my way?" she asked Kopel.

Coming down her way? An invitation to take her home. She was crazy! And impertinent, the little slut! Of course, he wouldn't go.

"Well, if you wait a minute, I'll walk down as far as Muskenaw Avenue with you," he replied.

She grinned. How scarlet her lips were against her white teeth. "Sure, I'll wait."

Shoulder to shoulder they strolled down Western Avenue to Pine Street, which was devoid of people. Kopel prayed that no one saw him. He would not speak to Serenka after to-night, or even see her. He swore to that!

They reached Muskenaw Avenue. Kopel wanted to turn up toward his home but his feet refused to move.

"Aw, com'mon, walk me up," Serenka teased. Under the faint moon, her helmet of golden hair shone pale, like dying silver.

Without a word he followed her. They walked in silence, their swining arms touching each other. Kopel experienced a faint, inexplicable sense of unreality. As they reached the outskirts of the town, the scent of the pines grew stronger and more pungent. The dark needles of the trees wove intricate lacquer patterns against the slow-moving translucent clouds. Their hands touched accidentally, and they knotted their fingers, strongly, hungrily. Kopel felt the blood hammering a mad staccato at his temples.

Through the thick trees a synthetic light shone faintly. Serenka's home. And suddenly the mad, ecstatic, pulsating wail of a violin. A fantastic rhapsody. Passionately, it sang its way into Kopel's heart, coursed through his full veins, clouded his vision, hoarsened his voice. He wanted to dance. Wildly. To throw Serenka over his shoulder and run away with her To beat her. To dance with her. On, on anywhere! Away!

"They're having a party," Serenka explained the music. "Pa gives a party every Saturday night, and they all get drunk and play

the music from the old country. That's Pete playing now. Crazy stuff, but don't it make you wanta dance, though?"

"Let's dance," Kopel swung her into his arms.

They danced wildly, their arms around each other, Kopel clutching his thick-lensed glasses in his hand. . . What breasts, what hips, what music, what moon! In the silver light, her eyes gleamed dangerously, luringly, like a cat's. Sweet, mad, grotesque, fantastic, incredible night! Dancing on into aching dream! Or painful nightmare!

Kopel started up in horror. The unreality, the charm, the glamour of the scene suddenly deserted him. Even the mad, impetuous, exciting music ceased to move him. God, this was madness! Awkwardly, he arose, putting on his glasses. He began to walk, forcing his weary, exhausted limbs, and refusing to heed Serenka's entreaties. He felt that he was in a nightmare, trying to run away from a terrible ogre and his legs refused to budge. His lips moved silently in prayer. He must get away. He must run. A fresh shower of perspiration drenched his clothes. His heart pounded dangerously. He could scarcely breathe, but he kept on. At last, after what seemed to him as endless hours, he reached Muskenaw Avenue.

At the door of his home, he tried to straighten his clothes. He was still breathing spasmodically. Carefully, he opened the kitchen door. A light was burning in the dining room. Miriam was waiting up for him.

Miriam. God, how could he face her! He never wanted to see her again. He never wanted to see anybody again. He wanted to go off in a corner and hide. Away from everyone.

"Why, Kopel!" Miriam, coming into the kitchen, gasped with horror. "My dear, what *is* the matter?"

"Nothing." He stared at the floor.

"But Kopel --"

Miriam's well-bred voice irritated him.

"Don't bother me, I don't want anything to eat. I'm going to bed!"

She went to the ice chest. "But Kopel, a glass of milk. You look ill --" He knocked the frosted glass out of her hand. It fell to the

floor with a brittle, delicate crash. The spilled milk ran under the table.

"Kopel, you're sick --"

"I'm not!" He burst out. "God damn it all, why can't you leave me alone!"

He rushed out of the room, and ran upstairs, her wail ringing in his ears. . . "Mama . . . what would mama say to this . . ."

He could not enter their bedroom. He could not sleep at Miriam's side. No! Without undressing, he threw himself down on the cot in the boys' room. He could hear Miriam sobbing in her lonely bed. At dawn he fell asleep.

He awoke with a start. The sun was streaming in through the open window. The boys' bed was empty. He lay still, his mind blank. The bees droned busily around the red geraniums in the flower boxes. The chimes of the cathedral hurt his head.

What a horrible nightmare he had had. He sat up. The blood seethed to his head and dizzied him. But was it a nightmare? God, no! It had happened, really happened! How could he face Miriam after last night? How could he face anybody? How could he face himself?

He arose, undressed and bathed. A cold bath, that set every nerve in his body tingling. Then he dressed again in fresh clothes, and walked downstairs, his heart sick with dread. Where was Miriam? Perhaps she had gone home to her mother. . .

In the kitchen Miriam arose to greet him with a cherry smile. Except that her eyes were red, there was nothing unusual about her demeanor. He gave vent to a profound sigh of relief. Miriam forgave him. He could tell by the expression of her eyes.

"Well, what have we got for breakfast, honey?" he boomed genially.

"Griddle cakes!" Griddle cakes were Kopel's favorite breakfast dish.

"Must have overslept. It's late, isn't it?"

"Yes, darling, but take your time."

As he finished his meal, he arose and got his hat. Miriam walked to the door with him.

"Goodbye, honey." He put his arms around her and kissed her.

She responded hungrily, with an intensity that he had never before witnessed in her. "I'll be through in a couple of hours," he told her. Kopel always spent Sunday morning at the store, checking up goods. "Be back at one."

"All right, darling. Don't forget we're going on a picnic with Papa and Mama and Aunt Fannie to-day."

He walked down the street at a jaunty pace. What a miracle that he had escaped unscathed! How lucky he was! And Miriam still loved him, and he had the kids, and his standing in the community was beyond reproach. Lucky! God, what if the Roses had ever found out. . .

III

When the golden-helmeted Serenka came into the store the following Saturday night, Kopel nodded to her casually, and called Leon to take care of her.

X

LOVE

I

Some day, Lotta, you'll go a little too far --'' Leon's voice was a squall of controlled rage.

''Yeah?'' Yeah? An' then what'll you do?'' Lotta glanced nonchalantly at her too-brilliantly polished nails and rubbed them with a chamois, which she always carried in her bag.

''I'll kill you, Lotta -- I swear it --'' His voice was losing its control and rising in hoarse shrillness. ''Mark my words -- Lotta--''

Abruptly, he ceased his nervous pacing and stopped directly in front of the davenport on which Lotta was lounging. ''I've been waiting up for you since twelve o'clock --''

''Yeah?'' Lotta laughed maliciously. ''What about the little bitch from the stock company. Turned you down flat for the night, eh?''

Leon disregarded her thrust. ''Look here, Lotta -- you've got a home, one of the nicest around here -- you've got all the clothes you want, you've got jewelry, a pretty decent allowance -- for the love of God, what more do you want? Why can't you leave men alone?''

She said nothing. She remained absorbed in the contemplation of her fingernail.

''Lotta --'' he accused her in a burst of new fury. ''Lotta, you've been seeing Bob again --''

She was silent. A malicious and satisfied little smile spread over her face and pulled the corners of her too-red mouth askew.

Leon towered over her. He reached down and pulled her up

roughly. His fingers dug themselves cruelly into the plump flesh of her arms.

"Damn you, I'll show you! I'll show you once for all!" His voice shrieked with hysterics.

Stoically, she disregarded the pain. Slowly, deliberately, she stood on tiptoe and pressed her ripe, wet lips against his chin. His eyes brightened feverishly and his grasp loosened. "Lotta --" His voice came convulsively in short, gasping breaths. "Lotta --" His mouth found hers and fastened itself hungrily, like a leech. With an effort she drew away.

"Lotta --" Almost he fell down and embraced her thighs and knees. "Lotta, darling --" His voice was thick with tears. "Lotta -- be good to me --"

II

Of his brothers and sisters, Leon preferred Kopel. Quite natural, this preference; for the boys always had been together, from childhood, when Kopel, a chubby youngster, had been sent out in the yard to mind the baby, Leon, through the days that they chopped wood for Ma's kitchen stove and helped her to lift the heavy, steaming washtubs, to the time when they rushed to the store before and after school, and through adolescence and into manhood.

But despite their intimacy, there was a marked degree of reticence between them. When Kopel commenced "going" with Miriam Rose, he spoke of her only casually to Leon, until the day that their engagement was announced. And when Leon fell in love with Lotta, Kopel did not mention her name (although he knew of her relations with his brother and was worried about them) until Leon came to him in despair and confided the whole story.

In later years, however, they grew more frank with each other concerning their intimate lives, and although Kopel never told Leon the story of his pseudo-Bacchanalian revel with the golden-helmeted Serenka, he felt no scruples in lecturing Leon about his relations with the questionable virgins of the Elite Stock Company. . .

His younger brothers and sisters, Leon treated casually, with a rather contemptuous detachment. They were a bawling, filthy lot of Indians. Except Gregory. Gregory was a funny kid, but on the whole, better than the others.

Sometimes, on Sunday afternoons, Leon used to take the boy on a walk with him and tell him about the trees and the leaves and the bugs and things. Gregory would appear to listen eagerly, but when Leon would ask him a question he would receive for reply a blank look that made him realize the kid hadn't heard a word he was saying.

This exasperated Leon. "What the devil are you thinking about, Greg?"

"Huh?" Gregory would look up blankly, his deep set, blue eyes cloudy under the untidy mass of his black hair. "Leon, how do the leaves get such colors in the fall, huh? Just like somebody threw a lot of paint, red an' yellow an' blue, into a pail, without really mixing 'em and slopped 'em over the leaves. Huh, Leon?"

Greg certainly was a queer one. Sometimes, he would walk along the road with Leon for hours without uttering a word, and then, coming to a patch of woods, he would burst out in a frightened voice, "Oh, don't go in there, Leon! It's chuck full of tigers an' lions an' ogres! Honest! I c'n almost see 'em from here!" And no matter how much Leon argued, even threatening to leave him behind and enter the wood himself, Gregory refused to move forward.

As he grew older, Leon ceased taking Gregory with him. He went alone. Of course, he would have enjoyed walking with Kopel, but Kopel hated hikes. On Sundays, Kopel dressed up and paced Western Avenue. Leon grunted disapprovingly. Of course, it was all right to be well dressed -- Leon liked nice things himself -- but to stand before a rack for hours trying to chose the smartest suit or shirt or tie, the way Kopel did, was absolutely crazy!

His mother, Leon loved in a devoted and impersonal fashion. He regretted that she worked so hard -- it wasn't fair, really, when Pa could afford a hired woman to do all the washing and ironing and bed-making. She was always too busy to give him much attention

and he learned to do without it, although he would have liked being petted. . .

Like Kopel, he feared and hated his father, Israel Challanty. And these emotions born of his youth lasted through his whole life. But unlike Kopel, he managed to hide his feelings under a cloak of contempt. He laughed at the old man -- but obeyed him implicitly. And Israel was furious at his amused contempt, writhed under it, but gloated in the knowledge of his iron rule over his second son.

School never phased Leon. He was an apt pupil, grasping things quickly, and as the teachers were invariably fond of him, he made rapid progress. Had he been allowed more time for himself, he might have received innumerable social honors, but immediately after school hours, he was compelled to rush down to the store to work, in order that his father might be placated.

When he entered high school, Leon was a short, stocky youth, heavy and thickset, but possessing unusual physical agility. The coach asked him to try out for football and he made the freshman team easily. In his second year he was placed on the school squad, where he played halfback for three years, justly earning the reputation of being one of the greatest halfbacks in the history of the state high school teams. He had enormous physical power, speed, and an instinct for playing the game.

Although Israel Challanty was immensely proud of his boy, Leon never knew it. For the old man made a great fuss when Leon told him that during the months of September, October and November, he would not come down to the store immediately after school.

"I have to show up for practice every night until five-thirty. And then I've got my home work --"

"So you'll do the home work in the store --"

"I can't, Pa, honest! The coach says we have to be in bed nine o'clock during training --"

"'The coach says --'" Israel mimicked. "For everything you have one answer: 'the coach says --' Does your coach support you, heh? Does he give you eat and drink and clothes and a bed? When you need a dollar for books, does your coach give it to you, heh? No! For such things you come crawling to me -- but otherwise, the

coach is your God! Loafer, you! You'll come to the store, you hear me!''

Finally, however, after many arguments and a long talk with the persuasive coach, Israel consented. After all, having a Challanty on the team might bring business to the store. . .

After he had graduated from high school with a fine football reputation and a fairly good scholastic record, he was offered a scholarship at Ionia College, one of the less important institutions of learning in the state of Michigan. Eagerly he accepted it, for he hated the notion of going back to work at the store all day, drudging, dusting, unpacking cases, waiting on Wops and Hunkies. . .

Israel Challanty was very much adverse to his son's inclination for higher education and more football. Curtly he refused to pay for Leon's expenses.

''I have been supporting you for eighteen years --'' he raged -- ''A good home, clothes, food, spending money, everything you want! Now, when I need you in the store you want to go away. To college. What you need college for, eh? Don't you know enough yet? Ain't you played enough ball yet? Loafer -- I didn't go to college, did I?''

Nevertheless, despite his parent's warning -- ''Don't expect a penny from me, you hear!'' -- Leon left, one cool, crisp September morning for Ionia College. He had just enough money over his carfare to keep him in a bed and meals for a week.

By waiting on tables in the college dormitory and by stoking furnaces, Leon earned his expenses. Occasionally, without the knowledge of his father, his mother used to send him several dollars which she had hoarded secretly and often a package of clothes, underwear, shirts, ties, which Kopel had smuggled out of the store. In the summertime, Leon worked in the store.

After three years of brilliant football playing and a fair scholastic record, Leon Challanty was graduated from Ionia College, and returned to Muskenaw a full-fledged B.A., incidentally having accepted the position of Director of Athletics of the Muskenaw High School.

Bessie Challanty was proud of her son. A college graduate. How

wonderful! Bessie stood in awe of the very term "college." In the old country, only the children of the very wealthy and cultured Jews could gain admittance to a university; there, she would never have dreamed of the possibility of a child of hers receiving a fine education -- but here, in this America, it seemed that everything was possible -- her husband, Israel, had become a rich man; her son, Leon, was the graduate of a university.

And in his fashion, Israel was pleased, too. Having the coach of the high school teams for a son was fine advertising. Lots of people who never entered the store before would be coming in now! And the young high school crowd, too. . . Ah, that was great! Israel rubbed his palms with pleasure in private and continued to scowl at Leon in public. They had a quarrel about the weekly amount Leon was to pay for his board, and only after the young man threatened to leave the house entirely did Israel go down on his price.

"But you got to come to the store and help out when it's busy --" he amended and Leon wearily promised.

So for the first few years after college, Leon lived a quiet and placid existence. At high school, he was idolized not only by the students but also by the teachers. He was a good coach, he knew football, and had the faculty of imbuing his team with his own intuition and enthusiasm and zest for winning.

Leon paid little attention to women. He liked them in a casual, off-hand fashion; he dabbled in several superficial flirtations, but nothing serious ever came of them. He had a youthful and nebulous conception of the kind of woman he would fall in love with -- a fair, delicate creature -- but among the school teachers and other young ladies of Muskenaw he could not find his ideal. It must be admitted that he did not trouble himself to search very strenuously.

Leon didn't take out Jewish girls. Jewish parents were funny. They thought if you took their daughter out a couple of times you were in love with her and they looked at you as if to say: "Well, when are you bringing the ring?" It made you feel uncomfortable, and even if you rather liked the girl, you didn't want to ask her out again. A fellow liked to make his own proposals. . .

No, Leon didn't take out Jewish girls. . .

III

As soon as Coach Leon Challanty saw Bill Vanderlaan, a tall, lanky, yet massive youth, he knew that he had found star football material. And he trained the boy during his freshman year as thoroughly as he did his senior men, and in his sophomore term, Bill stepped capably into the shoes of the graduated halfback.

Leon took a fancy to the boy. He was a rugged, massive fellow, clumsy, except on the field where his agility and speed were amazing. Not much brains but a damn good kid! He told Leon that his parents were dead and he lived with his sister who worked in the Alison Knitting Mill and supported him. But he intended to pay her back for everything as soon as he got out of school.

"She's a peach," Bill explained enthusiastically. "An' she's awful pretty, too. Everybody's crazy about her. You'll see her at the football dinner, Coach. I'm bringing her."

On Thanksgiving Day, the Muskenaw High School football team played its keenest competitor and rival, the Grand Rapids Morris High, and invariably won the game. And on Thanksgiving night, the annual football dinner was held. This function was undoubtedly the social event of the school, more important even than the Junior Prom. Muskenaw took its athletics seriously. That year, the Chamber of Commerce presented Coach Challanty and the squad with engraved gold watches. Muskenaw had won the state championship for the first time.

The dinner was held in the basement hall of the Methodist Church.

The large, square room was adorned with artificial flowers, crepe-paper streamers of black and orange, stacks of yellow wheat and pumpkins. The art department of the Stackley Manual Training School always took care of the decorations. . . The prettiest freshman and sophomore girls served as waitresses. The high school orchestra, dressed in dark blue suits, stiff collars and black bow ties, furnished the rather screechy music. The chemistry instructor, Mr. Lamont, a tall, genial young man, was toastmaster.

He was a clever one, that fellow; he knew how to make everyone laugh. . .

The football squad, their supercilious feminine companions, and Coach Leon Challanty occupied the round table at the head of the hall. Between the courses of the chicken dinner, the orchestra played. Leon radiated pleasure. His heart warmed toward the boys. They were good fellows and they sure had worked hard to win the state championship. They deserved all the good words said about them. Give 'em a hand! Fine boys, all of them! Especially that kid, Bill Vanderlaan.

Bill Vanderlaan came in late. After everyone had commenced eating and Mr. Lamont was beginning his witty remarks about the members of the team.

Bill came in with his sister. Leon gasped when he saw her. He felt that his heart was somersaulting to his trembling lips.

She was a bit plump, with a sort of cherry and milk fairness of skin and flaxen gold of hair that made Leon blink and want to rub his eyes. She was dressed in pink tulle, a long skirt with many ruffles, and a bit of creamy lace at the bosom. Her hair was done up in innumerable little curls and she wore a pin studded with brilliants near her temple. It flashed like a myriad of fireflies under the gaslight.

Her name was Lotta.

She sat directly across the table from Leon. At Bill's enthusiastic introduction she smiled sweetly at Leon. He was lost. They had the first dance together.

"Queer that I've never met you before --"

Blue eyes smiling into his. He tightened his hold around her waist. Glide. Dip. Glide and glide and dip --

Everybody's doing it, doing it, doing it,
Everybody's doing it, doing it, doing it . . .

The orchestra shrieked raucously, and Leon hummed under his breath. Glide. Dip. How beautifully she danced. How smoothly, easily!

Everybody's doing it, doing it, doing it . . .

Glide. Dip. Bunny hug. "Everybody's doing it . . ." He could dance with her forever. What a lovely dress she wore. Pink tulle made her look like an angel. . .

"Have you lived here long?"

"No," she smiled. He noticed her long, thin lashes and the faint, steady color of her cheeks. "Bill and I have been here just two years. We're from Chicago."

How miraculous that she had moved to Muskenaw! Suppose that she had decided on another town, Grand Rapids or Detroit, for instance -- and he would never have met her! . . . Leon shuddered.

A second dance and a third. And a waltz. Lotta in his arms.

I met you in the garden of an old Kentucky town
The sun was shining down . . .

Everybody whispering: The Coach has danced almost every number with Bill's sister. . .

You wore a gingham gown . . .

He hummed the words, holding her close, their bodies moving in rhythm. A gingham gown. How lovely Lotta would look in gingham. A blue-and-white-checked house dress. In a yellow kitchen. Waiting for him to come home. Kissing him as he rushed in. Darling . . . darling . . . Cooking for him. The two of them washing the dishes . . . and then . . .

When you wore a tulip, a sweet yellow tulip
And I wore a big, red rose . . .

Dancing . . . dancing. Body to body. . . Cheek to cheek in the dark corners. . . Poignant sweetness. . . Dancing. . .

"When will I see you again?" he murmured.

"Oh, I don't know. I work awful hard, and then I do most of the

housework, too. It keeps me pretty busy. I don't find much time for myself."

Poor kid. Brave little kid. To work so hard, to support her brother, and to do the housework, too. Wonderful little girl.

"Some night this week --"

"Maybe --" with sweet hesitation.

"All right --"

"Good night . . ."

"*Good night* . . ."

He walked home in a daze.

IV

Broad stretch of road rimmed with faded plumage of tall trees, and with lonely silver moonlight. Chugging along in a large, awkward automobile that Israel Challanty had bought in Lansing. Leon in a black-and-white-checked motor cap. Lotta in an enormous hat covered with a pink tulle veil.

"Gee, this is a swell automobile, Mister Challanty --"

He turned toward her. The car swerved dangerously. She screamed lightly, in fear.

"Never mind the 'Mister Challanty' stuff. Call me Leon!"

"Oh, but I hardly know you, Mist --"

Again he turned toward her. The car ran dizzily toward a tree and righted itself just in time to avoid a collision.

"Please --" she gasped. "Don't stare at me -- You might smash the car --"

"I don't care," recklessly. "Any time you call me 'Mister Challanty' I'll do the same thing --"

"Ohhhhh . . ."

"Well?"

She smiled sweetly. "Of course, I don't want the car to be smashed . . . Leon . . ."

"Only the car you care about?"

". . . Or you, Leon . . ." Low, coy sweetness.

Shoulders closer together. Giggles. Speeding across the silvery

road at the rate of fifteen miles an hour! Together. Night air rushing by . . . cooling, hot cheeks. . .

"Gee, you sure know how to drive . . . Leon . . ." with obvious admiration.

There followed long, lovely nights of moonlit drives. Generally, he brought Lotta home promptly at eleven o'clock. "I mustn't stay out later. Bill sits up an' waits for me, you know --" What wonderful devotion between the brother and sister! Leon marveled at it, and was a little jealous of Bill. . . No feelings like that between the members of his own family. . .

After their second drive he had the courage to kiss her hand in farewell. And after the third. . . Soft, pliant, eager, melting kisses. . . Mustn't lose your senses. . . Hold on, tight. . . Wonderful girl, divine girl.

Vague, restless, troubled dreams. Waking up in a turbulent perspiration. . .

One Sunday afternoon early in December, before the first snow, Leon couldn't get the car (the old man was using it for a trip to Grand Rapids) and he proposed a long walk. "Wear low-heeled shoes," he cautioned Lotta, but she said that she owned nothing but French heels. "And I'll show you something of Lake Michigan."

They took the street car to the city limit and from there they commenced their walk.

It was a cheerless, silent afternoon, filled with a vague, suspended unease that portended storm. The tall, naked trees were patriarchal skeletons stationary in the chill air which was devoid of all wind, and the brittle, brown leaves rotted around the roots of the trees in listless death. The world was empty of all sound and motion.

They walked along in silence, Leon absorbed in his dreams, Lotta clinging tightly to his arm as she stumbled over the twigs and stones in the path. "Isn't this fine, Lotta, being all alone, just we two --"

No answer.

He looked at her. "Lotta, don't you like this, dear? Then we'll stop, we'll go back --"

"No, no!" She smiled with brave and martyred sweetness. "No, no, we'll go on -- If you like this, you know I do --" She squeezed his arm. "I like everything that you like," she confided with a childish naivete.

Dear, sweet, unselfish girl! To plug on, bravely, in her high heels and thin soles because she thought he liked the walk. So filled was Leon's heart with love and tenderness that he thought it would burst. . .

They turned from the road and climbed down the steep hill, Leon helping Lotta pick her way among the stones.

They reached the dunes of Lake Michigan.

The low, overcast skies baited their leaden reflections in the water, tinting it a hard, dying favillous blue. The dunes lay lifeless, splotches of mustard yellow, and beyond them stood the pines, starkly straight, with pathetic and raveled gallantry. The whole scene was so lovely, so utterly lifeless, so desolate in its awful solitude, that it instilled some of its enigmatic somberness into the souls of Leon and Lotta. Without realizing what they were doing -- with a common instinct, they began to run, toward the hill, climbing it with mad haste, tearing their clothes, scratching their faces, but never ceasing for a moment their pace. Lotta fell and bruised her arm. Without stopping, Leon picked her up and carried her. They reached the road and rushed on. On, on away from that awful, unearthly loneliness and desolation. . .

Could that have been Lake Michigan? The Lake which in the summer was so filled with bustle and activity and turbulent life? With steamers and motor boats, with bathers and picnic parties, with roller coasters and ferris wheels, with ice cream parlors and beer stands. . . The Lake that was the front porch for Muskenaw, the busiest, the most flourishing town in Michigan. . .

Why this sudden, this awful, terrifying change? He had seen the Lake on somber autumnal afternoons before, but it had never appeared so mysterious, so foreboding. . . Perhaps it was an illusion -- Leon rubbed his eyes -- perhaps a dream. . . Somehow, as he had been standing there, for a moment his body had become inanimate, and his soul too, suspended. He had sensed a premonition . . . a warning . . . of what? A dull, heavy stab had

pierced him, had seemed to kill something within him without actually touching his body concretely. He couldn't explain it. He didn't realize just what it was -- But something, something horrible --

Mustn't think about it. Must run on, with Lotta safe in his arms. Somehow, holding her close, feeling her warm, throbbing, pulsating flesh in his arms gave him a sense of security. Made him forget that horrible, fundamental, revealing moment when . . . what? What had it been? . . .

They reached the car line. Both were panting with exhaustion and fear. The tall, square red brick factories that lined upper Western Avenue were desolate and empty of life. The dirty windows grinned like leering skeletons. The awful solitude and inanimate unease of the Lake seemed to have spread its hungry, malevolent grip to these buildings. . .

"Let's walk down an' meet the street car."

Despite their fatigue, they could not stand still, waiting. It seemed to Leon that there a monster, a vague, nebulous octopus beast, was waiting to snatch them up. They ran, their breaths coming in jerky, spasmodic gasps. On. Until Lotta fell.

Leon picked her up and wiped the tears from her reddened eyes. They climbed aboard the street car and sat huddled together, their fingers knotted tightly, trying to ward off an unseen terror. They did not speak. They got off near the post office. Leon took Lotta to her door, but refused to come in.

They never spoke of that Sunday. They never took a walk again.

If Leon couldn't use the car, they went to the "movies."

V

He thought of Lotta constantly during the day. He dreamed of her at night. His blood whirlpooled with the unease that her vividness cast into it. He directed athletics in a daze, he sold merchandise at the store in a dream, he lived only for seeing her.

Then he found out about Bob.

Bob had long been one of Lotta's suitors. He was a foreman in the Alison Knitting Mill where Lotta worked. He was a tall, heavy

young man, with a handsome, rugged face and thickish lips. Lotta saw a lot of him. Leon learned to tell from the manner in which she said, "I'm sorry but I won't be able to see you to-night," when she was going to meet Bob.

When Leon reproached her, she replied, "But he is an old friend, Leon, sort of a protector --"

"Protector --" Fiercely. "Haven't you got me to protect you?"

"Yes, but --"

"I'll take care of you, I swear it! You have me, Lotta, you don't need anyone else --"

They were sitting in the front room of Lotta's flat. Lotta's brother, Bill, was away. He had gone to Grand Rapids to witness a basket-ball game and would not return until morning. All the fellows on the Muskenaw team had gone. They wanted to watch the tactics of their Grand Rapids rivals.

Lotta wore a house dress of pink voile sprigged with tiny yellow flowers and trimmed with lace around the low neck line. Her hair was combed in a swirl of small curls. They sat on the red plush sofa and listened to the phonograph grind out the mournful lamentation of Massenet's *Elegie*, a record which Leon had purchased for her. He had heard it at college and had taken a fancy to it.

They sat in silence. Leon's arm around Lotta's plump shoulder. She could feel the throb of his veins. She jumped up.

"I don't like that piece. Let's get something snappy!" She put a new disk on the phonograph. "Let's dance --"

Everybody's doing it, doing it, doing it!
Everybody's doing it, doing it, doing it!

Glide. Dip. The Bunnyhug. Breast to breast . . . the perfume of her hair . . . arms enfolding each other, legs gliding in unison.

Everybody's doing it, doing it, doing it!
Everybody's doing it, doing it, doing it!

How hot the room was! How painfully sweet it was to be alone with her, dancing with her. "Lotta, darling, darling Lotta --"

Caresses that rushed the blood to his head. The room whirled dizzily. They stumbled and fell upon the red plush sofa. Silence.

VI

Leon needed more money. His salary as Coach of the Muskenaw High School was insufficient for his expenses. He must have more money! Lotta was invariably so delighted when he brought her a gift -- a fine string of beads, delicate silk underwear, a crystal bottle of perfume, that he was constantly buying for her. And of course, he helped her out with her household expenses, too. Poor girl, she worked hard to make both ends meet, and to bring up the kid brother.

He commenced helping himself at the store, pocketing the money from many of his sales. Kopel, wary-eyed, noticed, but said nothing. Except an occasional word of caution: "Go easy for a few days, Leon, the old man is watching."

One evening, as he was going to visit Lotta, he saw Bob leave her house. When he reproached her, she commenced crying. "How can you be so cruel," she sobbed. "Bob has been so good to brother and me! And he loves me --"

"So do I --" Leon responded eagerly. "So do I, darling. Much more than he, much more --"

"Yes?" Another sob. "Well, Bob asked me to marry him."

Leon was silent. He stared at Lotta stupidly. After a while he said, "What did you tell him?"

Lotta came over and cuddled herself on his lap. "What could I tell him, dearie, when I love you? Besides --" She leaned over and whispered in his ear. Leon started up nervously. His heart pounded with fear and worry. This was a predicament.

Lotta was pregnant.

Had he been less conventional, his first emotion would have been joy. Lotta was going to bear him a child! But he remembered, too, with a heavy ache in his heart, that they weren't married and that in the eyes of the world the baby would be illegitimate.

Lotta was sobbing. "Oh, what'll I do? Leon, what'll I do?"

Leon closed his eyes. He wondered what his father and mother would say. He could imagine Israel's rage and Bessie's tears. And the scandal -- Oh, to hell with the scandal! He loved Lotta and Lotta loved him, and now that they were going to have a baby, he'd play fair, by God! What difference did religion make if two people cared for each other?

Nevertheless, he could not tell Lotta of his nebulous plans immediately. He had to fight the thing out for himself. Kissing her good night, and telling her not to worry, he slipped out of her flat, and wandered down the street. The cold, sharp night air cleared his head of cobwebs, and he was able to think concisely.

Although his religious training had been a very meager one, he realized how tenaciously his people clung to their own race, how bitterly they opposed and fought inter-marriage. No Jewish youth in Muskenaw had ever married a *shikse* -- he would be the first. . . His mother -- how would his mother feel? And Kopel . . . who hated scandal. . . And the old man. . . Probably drive him out of the house and store. . .

Well, it would hurt like the devil all around, but he couldn't let the feelings of the family spoil his own life. And he couldn't let Lotta down just when she needed him the most. Besides, he really wanted to marry her and have her with him always. . .

One afternoon, they drove to Grand Rapids and were secretly married. Then Lotta went to Chicago, and gave birth to a baby girl, which she left with her married sister, who lived in the city. Leon sent a weekly sum for the child's keep.

When she came back to Muskenaw, Leon found his expenses doubled. Lotta did not return to the Alison Knitting Mill, so Leon was compelled to take over the entire expense of the flat, including the support of Bill. Then his own upkeep, and the weekly sum for the child's maintenance and Lotta's clothes. . . Leon discovered that Lotta possessed an insatiable love of finery.

Even by helping himself liberally, Leon found that he still lacked sufficient money to meet expenses. Finally, he confided in Kopel.

Kopel was horrified. He knew that Leon was playing with the little Swede who worked in the Knitting Mill, but he had never dreamed that Leon would be fool enough to marry her. God, the

scandal! What would Miriam say? What would the Roses say? What would the town say?

"Perhaps you can buy her off to divorce you quietly?" he suggested.

Leon bristled. "Why should I?" he demanded. "I love her. I want to live with her openly."

Kopel pondered. "Well there's only one thing you can do," he said. "Make a clean breast of it to the old man and Ma."

It was on a Saturday morning that Leon broke the news of his marriage to his parents. He came down to breakfast just as Israel was preparing to leave for the synagogue. He and Bessie were sitting in the warm kitchen, talking. Bessie was drinking steaming black coffee.

Leon spoke bluntly. "You might as well know it right away, folks. I'm married."

They stared at him, mouths agape. Israel was the first to recover.

"Married? Married? What you talking about? Is this a time to joke!"

"It's no joke. I tell you I'm married."

"To who? To who are you married?"

"To Lotta Vanderlaan." He explained further, "She used to work in the Alison Knitting Mills --"

Israel jumped up, his face the color of a cooked beet. "*To a shikse?* You are married to a *shikse* --?"

Leon nodded, but said nothing.

"God Almighty, are you crazy? Married to a *shikse*! Why couldn't you marry a Jewish girl, a respectable girl, like your brother, Kopel? There ain't enough Jewish girls -- you got to pick out a gentile -- a bum from the Mills yet, too? --" He turned to Bessie and shook his fist furiously at her. "This is what your college did to him! You hear, he marries a *shikse*! Such shame he brings on my head! What will everybody say? The whole town will laugh at me! The son of the treasurer of the synagogue gets married to a gentile girl --"

Bessie's thin sobs were drowned under the violence of his hoarse cries.

"Out of my house -- loafer -- *sheigetz* -- out of my house --" old Israel screamed in fury. "To bring such shame upon my head! Out of my house --"

But Israel's fury spent itself quickly. He needed Leon in the store. Leon was a good salesman. As for the scandal -- well, it was done, and couldn't be helped now. . . At night, Bessie's pillow was wet with tears, but she said nothing. . .

Several years passed before Lotta formally met her father- and mother-in-law.

Leon and Lotta rented a flat on Western Avenue in one of the new buildings and set up housekeeping with fine new furniture. At the end of the school year, Leon resigned his post as Coach of the Muskenaw High School and went into his father's store to work steadily. He was madly, ecstatically, devotedly in love with Lotta, and he spent his days dreaming and scheming of more ways in which to make money to lavish on her and his nights in appreciating the endless, boundless generosity of her love. . .

VII

Years filled with horror. Quarrels, jealousies, miseries. Eternal strife. Eternal bicker. And more quarrels. More arguments. Trying to buy, to hold her affection with a beautiful home in Muskenaw Heights, with a car, with jewels, with lovely clothes. Trying to overlook and forget her promiscuity. More quarrels, always ending the same, always ending the same. . . "Lotta, be good to me. . ."

Loving her. Hating her. God, how can one hate so fiercely the woman one loves so madly. . . And more quarrels, petty, daily ones; big, weekly ones. . .

"Damn you, I wouldn't have married you except for the kid --"

Shrill, piercing, triumphant laughter. Derision. "You damn sheeny, the kid ain't yours --"

VIII

He could not forget her. He was bound to her with iron bands which he himself had forged and now lacked the power to break. His old ideal of her was gone. He thought he saw her clearly as she really was -- petulant, pleasure-loving, sensual, promiscuous -- but still he loved her. In the hours when he knew that she was in the arms of another man, when he felt that he should hate her -- and did hate her -- he wanted her back -- to forgive her -- to ask her forgiveness, if necessary -- anything, only to have her back, back to him. . .

He tried to forget her with other women. The girls from the Elite Stock Company. The girls of Dago Mike's. But always he came back to her. Always with an unclean, brown taste in his "mouth," and a plea for forgiveness.

He bought her everything her heart desired. He gave her absolute freedom. He pleaded, he begged her for fair play -- "Fair play, hell!" -- He raged. He threatened to leave her. He threatened her with divorce, scandal --

To everything she had one answer, which she knew to be the most potent in the world. Her scarlet mouth. A kiss from her lips and he was helpless. He hated himself for his weakness, he berated himself for his cowardice, for his lack of strength, but she held him in an octopus grip. He could not break away.

Between his own affairs, he watched her. He knew that she was playing with Bob -- the probable father of the child which he, Leon, was supporting -- but she was running with other men as well.

Night after night, waiting for her to come home. Short, stocky Leon, grown bald and a bit too fleshy, dressed in bright pajamas and brocaded dressing gown, pacing up and down, up and down, waiting for Lotta. Finally, after hours of waiting, waiting, waiting, with aching nerves frazzled and on edge, he heard her come in and saw her -- face carefully tinted, blond hair in a pyramid of curls, too-expensively dressed, reeking of perfume and cigarettes. . . More quarrels. Bitter, explosive, wounding words. . .

"Some day, Lotta, you'll go too far --"

"Yeah?" Lighting another violet-scented cigarette. Yeah?" Tauntingly.

"I'll kill you, Lotta, I mean it! I'll kill you with my bare hands --"

"You damn sheeny, you ain't got the guts --"

And again the clenched fists and the thirst to hurt her. . . And again her red, wet, sucking mouth, and the dizziness and the poignant hurt of forgetfulness. . . And again the pleading, "Lotta, be good . . . darling. . ." And again the constant bickering and strife, the daily petty quarrels, the jealousies. . . And again. . .

XI

A WOMAN LOVED POWER

I

It was the unanimous opinion of the Challanty brothers that Sophie was a calculating little beast. They hated her, making a vociferous and ostentatious display of their feelings. Perhaps their dislike was intensified by the knowledge that the old man liked Sophie and considered her smarter than the boys. That rankled, because she wasn't smart, really. Just underhanded and shrewd.

The trouble was that Sophie got everything she wanted. Not that it was handed to her -- oh, no! But if she set her heart on something, she would manage to get it, somehow, and she was hardly scrupulous in her methods.

The fellows wouldn't have minded that, even, if only she had been decent part of the time. But Sophie was mean. She would do anybody dirt to get her own way: squeal on the fellows or flatter and cajole them -- whichever course seemed at the moment the more feasible to her.

You could never believe a word she said, because she had absolutely no scruples about lying to gain her ends. Now Gregory lied too -- more than Sophie -- but somehow, you didn't mind Greg's fabrications so much. They were queer, harmless sort of lies; and Gregory was really a decent little kid -- took his medicine like a sport. But Sophie -- well, let any of the fellows displease her and she would run to tell Pa. And Pa always listened.

Sophie and Teresa were pals. Teresa was younger and a little afraid of Sophie, but she tried not to show it. She admired Sophie

and wished she had a "pull" with Pa, too. Teresa was scared to death of the old man.

Once, on a hot, untidy afternoon, Sophie went into the barn, and found Teresa and a little Wop lying in the hay. After that she could get Teresa to do anything she wanted.

II

Sophie loved power. She was like the old man in that respect. Even as a child, she bossed the younger brothers and sisters. She ordered them around more than Ma did and they feared her more than Ma. Sophie used her hands, a stick, a strap, anything, to punish them. Ma never touched them.

Sometimes they played school in the evening, all of them sitting on the back steps. Sophie was always the teacher. She never gave anybody else a chance.

In the house, Sophie worked hard. She helped Ma with the washing and cooking and bedmaking. And she made the others work, too. Teresa washed the dishes and Mattie wiped them. Gregory and the two younger boys, Danny and Barnett, scrubbed the floors and chopped wood and ran errands. She even found something for Asher to do.

Sophie disliked Gregory and consequently she found more work for him than anybody else. She was always picking on him, too, but he never answered her. Just looked at her in that queer, sullen way of his, and strode away. She used to tell Pa on him, saying that he was lazy and mooned around all day, and Pa used to whip him, but Gregory never changed his attitude. You could scold Gregory and yell at him and he would appear to listen to you, but when you finished talking he would go on doing what he wanted, exactly as if you had never said a word. That made Sophie furious. She wanted Gregory to obey her.

Sophie liked Kopel. She was always hanging around him and trying to talk to him. She set the table nicely and fussed around the house, cleaning it and doing everything to please Kopel. But Kopel never paid much attention to her. Except when he caught her picking on Gregory. Then he called her a "mean little skunk"

and Sophie would get red as if she were ashamed, and leave Greg alone until Kopel was out of sight. She loved Kopel's fine clothes and when he was away from home, she sneaked up to his room and opened the closet and bureau drawers to admire them.

When Kopel married Miriam Rose and left the house, Sophie missed him acutely. He seldom came home, and Miriam never invited Sophie to visit them or to attend her parties. Sophie hated Miriam, and she used to lie awake nights thinking of some way in which to hurt her. . .

Sophie never got along well with Leon. Once, he slapped her. Hard, on the cheek. She got even with him when he married Lotta Vanderlaan. She tried to talk the old man into throwing Leon out of the store for good. When he refused, she snubbed Lotta. Always. Never, in youth or later years, did she acknowledge her as a sister-in-law. She called Lotta, "That dirty blonde."

When she was in the sixth grade, Sophie left school. She possessed no great aptitude for learning; she preferred housework. It was much more fun staying home, helping Ma and bossing the kids, than doing a lot of sums and reading silly books. . .

She was a good housekeeper.

"You'll make a fine wife for some man," Israel chuckled.

"Yeahhh --" The boys laughed in derision. A heluva wife she'd make! They were sure sorry for the man she married. . .

Teresa liked Ma and Mattie loved her, but Sophie didn't seem to care much for Ma. Sophie was always showing off in front of Pa, scolding Ma, making fun of her English, and nagging her. Once Ma became angry and called Sophie a nasty name and Sophie ran crying to Pa. Pa took her part, of course, and since that time Ma never said another word.

Ma was glad when Sophie got married and left the house.

III

Sophie Challanty and Elizabeth Rabenstein were intimate friends. Until Sophie decided to stay home, they had attended school together, and after that they continued seeing each other

frequently. Of course, Elizabeth had more time for herself than Sophie. She didn't help in the house -- the Rabensteins kept a hired girl all the time and had a woman come in for the weekly cleaning -- but occasionally she minded the younger children.

On Sunday afternoons, the two girls used to walk up and down Western Avenue, staring in the windows, discussing clothes, and giggling when the fellows who strolled in pairs made overtures toward them. Elizabeth was invariably dressed better than Sophie. Even glib-tongued Sophie couldn't inveigle old Challanty into giving her many dresses, although every time she was in the store, she managed to filch something -- a pair of silk hose, a studded comb, or a bit of underwear. . .

When she achieved her early twenties, Sophie was tall and scrawny, with straight Indian black hair, sparkling brown eyes whose beauty was deadened by her pinched nostrils and the calculating line of her mouth. Most men did not take to her. She was too aggressive; she lacked the necessary feminine softness. She was too hard, too selfish, too engrossed in herself to cater to any man. She wanted to rule, not to be ruled.

"You know, there's a new fellow in town." Thus Sophie to Elizabeth as they were walking together.

"Yes," Elizabeth blushed. "I met him. He had dinner with us Saturday."

Sophie stopped short. "And you didn't tell me about it before?" Accusingly. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"There's nothing to tell. He was at the synagogue Saturday morning and Papa asked him home to dinner. We generally have strangers to dinner on Saturday."

Sophie asked, "What's he like?"

"Oh, quite nice." Again the blush. "He isn't very tall -- not as big as you -- and kind of light -- Brown hair and blue eyes and quiet -- but nice --"

Sophie glanced shrewdly at the girl by her side. Elizabeth was pretty, undeniably so. She was fair, like her father, with blond hair and soft, deep blue eyes, and a gentle manner. And now there was a curious, shining glow in her eyes. . .

"What's he going to do?"

"Open a store, I think. A shoe store."

They walked in silence for a block.

"That's a pretty hat --" Elizabeth pointed to a rose-colored straw, piled with cornflowers, sitting with solitary haughtiness in a window.

"Yes. . ." absently. "Umm, when are you going to see him again?"

"Who?" Innocently.

"This new fellow." Sophie could be direct, if necessary.

"I don't know. I think Mama invited him for dinner again. . ."

"When?"

"Just as soon as he gets back from Chicago."

"Next Saturday?"

Elizabeth squirmed. "I guess so."

"What's his name?"

"David. David Block. . ."

After she parted with Elizabeth, Sophie walked home engrossed in thought. Elizabeth was in love with this new man. She could tell from the way the girl talked about him. And if Elizabeth liked him, she reasoned, he must be very nice. . .

Then and there, Sophie resolved that she must have David Block.

V

The following Saturday, Sophie attended synagogue. She saw David Block. He corresponded with Elizabeth's description -- a thin, delicate young man with a shock of brown hair and blue eyes that glowed with a smoldering serenity in his pale, bony face. Although Sophie did not become enthusiastic about his appearance, she wanted him anyway. . . If Elizabeth liked him, he must be a "catch." Well, Elizabeth wasn't going to have him. . .

Immediately after dinner, she ordered Teresa and Mattie to clear the table and wash the dishes. She herself ran upstairs to dress. She was going to pay the Rabensteins a visit.

She dressed carefully, in her best blue and white foulard, with a long, tiered skirt. After powdering her nose and combing her

straight black hair into a pompadour, she walked toward Muskenaw Avenue at a slow, even pace until she reached the Rabenstein home. Her heart beat loudly. Mrs. Rabenstein, grown plump and genial, opened the door:

"This *is* a pleasant surprise. Come in! Come in!"

"I was just passing and I thought I'd drop in to see Elizabeth. Perhaps she'd like to come for a walk --"

"Oh, I'm sorry, Elizabeth isn't home --"

"Isn't home?" stupidly.

"No, she left the house about an hour ago. She and Mr. Block decided to take a walk --" Sarah Rabenstein smiled. She looked at Sophie appraisingly. "Won't you come in for a moment, anyway?"

"No, I think I'll go on --"

"Remember me to your parents, my dear --"

Taking a walk. Elizabeth was taking a walk with David Block. Sophie raged inwardly at the manner in which Mrs. Rabenstein smiled. As if Elizabeth's strolls with David Block were ordinary, everyday occurrences. The impudence of them. David Block was going to be hers.

Sophie went after David Block in a method which to her feminine intuition seemed the most efficacious.

A greater display of friendliness toward Elizabeth Rabenstein. Constant visits to her home. On Sunday evenings when David Block dropped in to see Elizabeth, he invariably found Sophie with her.

"Won't you stay for supper, Sophie --" This from Elizabeth's mother.

"Well --" hesitatingly, "I don't think I should --"

Silence. Neither Mrs. Rabenstein nor Elizabeth showed a tendency toward persuasion.

"-- but still, I guess Teresa can help Ma with supper to-night." She turned brightly to David. "You see, I do most of the work in the house. Ma ain't so strong --" She smiled bravely and David returned her glance in polite and abstract sympathy.

Generally, they took a walk after supper. Elizabeth and David and Sophie. Up through Western Avenue, whose store windows

were brightly lit. They stopped to gaze at enticing displays of feminine clothes.

"Ohhh! What a lovely hat," Elizabeth exclaimed. "I'd like to get it. I need a new hat anyway."

Sophie: "But the Fashion Shop's things are so expensive, dear! Why don't you go into Hardy's? Their hats are just as nice and not half so high." She smiled at David. "I don't believe in paying a lot for clothes --"

They stopped to look at a store which displayed a living room suite of golden oak and brown leather, resplendent against a synthetic window curtained in velvet and lace.

"That's lovely furniture --" admiringly from Elizabeth.

"Yes," contributed Sophie. "My brother Kopel got a suite like that when he was married, but personally, I think it's awful silly to buy such expensive furniture. Young people ought not to be so extravagant if they want to get somewhere."

Elizabeth walked in silence, like a child that has been reprimanded publicly. David said nothing until they reached the gaudy lights of an ice cream parlor. "Let's go in for a sundae," he suggested.

As they sat around the tiny table, eating rich concoctions of ice cream, fruit, whipped cream and nuts, Sophie's knee brushed against David's. . .

On the homeward stroll, Sophie suggested, "Let's walk Elizabeth home. She lives nearest --"

"Good night, Elizabeth, dear, I'll see you soon --" brightly.

"Good night, Miss Rabenstein --" David pressed Elizabeth's gloved hand in his. His eyes sought hers in the darkness.

As Sophie and David walked away, Elizabeth stood still for a moment on the moon-washed porch. She noticed that Sophie had tucked her arm intimately under David's elbow. She was smiling down at him. Elizabeth wondered at the heaviness of her heart -- and felt ashamed of her thoughts. . .

"It's early. Let's walk a little more," Sophie suggested.

They strolled up Muskenaw Avenue to Stackley Park.

"How is your business coming along?" Sophie inquired.

"Pretty good," David answered. "The start is fine. I hope to

build it up considerably." He was thinking of Elizabeth's slim form and lovely face. . .

They walked around the park in silence. Sophie held his arm closely.

"You know," she remarked suddenly. "Elizabeth is a nice girl. I think a lot of her, but she is awful extravagant. Rabenstein hasn't got half Pa's money but you ought to see how Elizabeth spends money! Like water. The Rabenstein's don't know how to manage --"

"Yes --" Politely. David Block did not appear eager to discuss the Rabensteins.

When they finally reached the Challanty home, they found it veiled in darkness.

"Good night, Mister Block, this has been a swell evening."

"Thank you. Good night, Miss Challanty," with precise politeness. His thoughts were far away, on Elizabeth Rabenstein's wistful good-by in the moonlight.

"Oh say!" eagerly, "Why don't you come over some evening?"

"If I may." Sophie sensed the lack of enthusiasm in his voice.

"Well, let me see -- why don't you come over Wednesday night, and we'll take a walk or something?"

"All right."

She squeezed his arm and ran into the house.

David Block walked home in bewilderment.

When he came to call for her the following Wednesday evening, she suggested that they go to Mona Lake. "It's a nice ride by trolley --"

There followed many evening strolls and rides to Mona Lake. Invariably, Sophie was the one who suggested the appointments. And David was too much of a gentleman to refuse. Besides, after a time, he found that he rather liked Sophie, unconsciously responding to her direct animalism.

David never was quite certain how his marriage to Sophie came about. It seemed to him that he was a helpless bit of driftwood overwhelmed and submerged by forces which were too strong for

his meager resources to withstand. If he regretted that Fate, in the malicious guise of the release of those emotions so necessary for the perpetuation of the race, had driven him into the arms of Sophie, he put the notion from him and tried never to think of it. His first intimacy with Sophie had been so spontaneous and sudden, so vivid and yet so remote an incident, that it seemed precisely like a vague dream. . .

He was good to Sophie and Sophie resented his kindness. There was something back of it -- lack of affection, perhaps -- that caused his detached consideration to drive her into rages. Her home she loved. David had allowed her to buy the furniture and other accessories for the household without interfering. She spent hours fussing around the house, cleaning, and cooking -- although David's polite nightly remark, "That was a very delicious supper, Sophie," was apt to infuriate her. Somehow, his words made her feel like a waitress.

. . . But anyway, she had gotten what she wanted.

Sabbath morning in the little synagogue on Pine Street.

Mrs. Rabenstein: "Congratulations, Mrs. Challanty!"

Mrs. Challanty: "Many thanks. And the same to you --"

Mrs. Rabenstein: "A boy, yes?"

Mrs. Challanty: "Yes, a boy!"

Mrs. Rabenstein: "And how is Sophie?"

Mrs. Challanty: "Well, under the circumstances -- You know, she had a bad fall. . ."

Mrs. Rabenstein: "A fall --?"

Mrs. Challanty: "Yes, as she was leaving my house yesterday, she slipped on a step and fell. At first, the doctor didn't think the child would live -- but thank God --"

Rabbi Mason reading the Scroll in his sweet, sing-song monotone. Israel Challanty swaying near the altar, wrapped in prayer shawl, green eyes cast piously heavenward. Women peering over their spectacles into huge, finely printed prayer books, mumbling in low, even accents.

Mrs. Challanty: "And how are your children?"

Mrs. Rabenstein: "Very well, thank God!"

Mrs. Challanty: "I hear Elizabeth is going to Chicago. . .? . . ."

A nod, but no verbal reply.

V

The late afternoon sun streamed into the kitchen, raising the heat to an unbearable intensity. Two children, a boy of about three years and a girl of fifteen months, were playing with the screen door, opening and closing it amid incoherent chuckles of delight.

"Shut that door and leave it shut!" Sophie ordered impatiently. "You're letting the flies in."

The children paid no attention to their admonition. They continued their amusing game. The door closed with a light, wooden bang.

"Stop it!" she screamed. She picked up the boy and slapped him lustily. He began crying and the little girl joined his outburst in ready sympathy.

Disregarding their united wails, Sophie turned back to the stove. The fish was burning. With a heated exclamation, she turned down the gas flame and rescued what she could of the burned food. Oh, well, David would have to get along with a salad and some fruit for supper. She certainly wouldn't fry another pan of fish to-day. Must be at least ninety-five in the shade. And the kids -- pestering her to death all day --

Uttering yells of delight, the children rushed down the walk. David was coming home. They loved their father, for he was infinitely nicer than Mom. He tossed them in the air and gave them pennies and brought them toys and never licked them! They raced to see who could reach him first. The little girl fell and hurt her knee. She screamed and David picked her up, kissing her tenderly. "There, there, Babe, look what Daddy brought you --" She forgot her pain. She nestled a flaxen-haired doll in her chubby arms.

"Why do you spend so much money on toys?" Sophie demanded irritably. "They've got too many, already. You're spoiling them."

"Oh, another doll won't hurt her. See, how she loves it!"

"Sure she loves it -- But don't forget that *I* have to go around picking up their things and putting them away!"

"Well, why don't you teach them to put their toys away when they finish playing?"

"Teach them! Teach them! Do you think that's all I've got to do through the day? Washing, cooking, cleaning, dressing them every hour, watching them! Teach them! Who'se got time --"

David did not answer. He set the little girl down on the porch and went inside to wash. Then he filled his pipe with fresh tobacco.

"Don't smoke before supper," Sophie fretted. "It'll spoil your appetite. And you'll get ashes over my clean floor --"

Without a word David put away his pipe. He placed the baby in her highchair and tied a bib around her neck. He washed the boy's hands and sat him down in his chair.

"How was business to-day?"

"Pretty fair."

"Did Anderson come in to pay his bill?"

"No, but when he has the money handy, he'll be in. He's slow, but he always pays."

"You make me sick!" Sophie retorted. "He's slow. Sure he's slow, if you'll let him be! He's rich enough to pay promptly, only he's a skinflint, and mark my words, if you don't keep after him, he'll never come across!"

David picked at his salad. He buttered a slice of bread for his son.

"Did Mrs. Rabenstein get her shoes yet? The special order?"

"They came in to-night. I'll send 'em up in the morning."

"Why should you spend money on a messenger? Can't she come down to the store herself?"

"I spoke to her this afternoon. She is very busy. Going to Chicago, I believe --"

"Yes, for Elizabeth's wedding."

"What!"

"Yes, Elizabeth's got a man at last. Some one from Chicago." Sophie looked at her husband shrewdly. "You sort of liked her once, didn't you?"

David did not answer. He was absorbed in his thoughts.

Suddenly, he remembered the last Sunday night walk he had taken with Elizabeth and her wistful good-by in the wan moonlight. . .

He was getting so little out of life -- life of which he had once expected so much happiness and richness and abundance. . . Day after day, the same routine. Arising in the morning, bathing, and eating. Sophie, standing over the gas stove, frowsy in a stained kimona. The children crying. Opening the store. Working all morning. Rushing home to lunch. Bolting his food and getting out of the house quickly, in order not to have to listen to Sophie's whining complaints. Working hard all afternoon. Coming home to a nagging, scolding, inquisitive wife. David was weary. How nice it would be, he thought, not to come home to supper, to Sophie, some night. . .

One day, he tried it.

Writing Sophie a brief note, he left the store at the customary hour. However, he did not turn up Clay Avenue to go home. Instead he made for the dock on Western Avenue. He was a little frightened -- Would the children miss him? He loved them. He wanted to bring them up properly, to educate them, the boy to take his place in the world, the girl to fit herself for a successful marriage. The children -- he faltered -- but only for a second. Then he straightened himself and went on.

Sophie took her husband's departure philosophically. Through the ensuing weeks, when the town buzzed with speculation, she walked with her head high, refusing to answer questions or to make explanations. To her father, she said that David had gone and she didn't know for how long, but meanwhile, she planned to take charge of the business. She would hire a girl for the house, and the kids could spend part of the day with Ma. She rather liked the notion of running the store. She believed that she could make a greater success of it than David had. David possessed no real business sense. He was soft. He was easy. He never dunned bills. He waited until people came in to pay him.

Sophie put the store on a new basis. Like her father, she had a

shrewd business ability. At eight o'clock every morning, she arrived at the store and did not leave, except for a half-hour lunch, until six at night. She scolded the salesmen, she bickered with drummers, she went after old bills with a single-track energy, she fussed over window displays and sales.

And she got results. Within five years, *Block and Company, Shoes,* was the largest store of its kind in Muskenaw. And Sophie Block had convinced the world that she was as hard and shrewd and calculating in business as her father, old Israel Challanty. "A chip off the old block, all right," the drummers said, as they compared father and daughter. "Knows more about making money than all the sons put together."

She enlarged the business and bought a new home in Muskenaw Heights. She thought she was very happy. People called her a successful woman. But always as she walked along the street, she saw the world pointing a finger at her and saying, "Sophie Block. One of the Challanty girls, you know. Yes, her husband deserted her."

As she grew older and more successful in business, Sophie developed a certain poise that gave her a suggestion of distinction. She was not unprepossessing, yet, as in her youth, men did not take to her. Except those who were obviously out for money. Not that Sophie cared to marry again. The thought of divorce on the plea of desertion tormented her. For although she had never really cared for David, she could not entirely forget him . . . or forgive him. . .

Once, she heard that David had been seen in Chicago, at his brother's home. She sent him a letter. She wrote of the success of the business and her new home in Muskenaw Heights. She implied that he would be welcome if he cared to come back. . . She inclosed a picture of the children.

She never received an answer.

XII

INTERLUDE IN MARS

I

The low, broad table was crowded. Israel Challanty and his wife, Bessie, Sophie and her children, Leon, Ben Rose and his daughter, Fannie, and his two sons, Abe and Ike and Ike's wife, Kopel, Miriam and their children sat before the board decked with fine linens, sparkling glass, and shining silver, eating heartily and conversing with great animation. A large crystal bowl of hothouse buds graced the center and before Kopel's place glistened a pink-iced cake, flickering with a myriad of candles.

Kopel Challanty was celebrating his birthday and Miriam was giving a dinner in honor of the occasion. She had invited all of her intimate relatives and a few of Kopel's. After the birth of Miriam's third son, Israel Challanty and Ben Rose had at last become friendly again. Miriam was pleased. She disliked quarrels in the family. Of course, old Israel was impossible, but still, he was Kopel's father . . . and well off, though, of course, one never thought of that . . . and one simply had to be decent to him --

"Oh, no! There's absolutely no danger of America entering the war. Wilson's no fool --"

"You never can tell --"

"How do you think that would affect National Motors?"

"Ought to rise --"

"Hit a hundred and ninety-five, to-day."

"Did you sell?"

"No, I'm holding on. It'll go up higher."

For his birthday, Miriam had presented Kopel with a wrist

watch. During her last visit to Chicago, she had seen one on the arm of a handsomely attired Frenchman, and she knew Kopel would love it. Mufflers, silk pajamas, ties, shirts -- everyone gave Kopel something to wear.

Bessie Challanty said: "Your cakes are better each time I taste them, Miriam."

"I'm trying a new recipe for angel food to-morrow, Mother Challanty. If it comes out nice, I'll bake you a cake for next Saturday."

Aunt Fannie called Miriam's attention to the sale of linens at Hardy's. "Some really marvelous values, Miriam. Do you need anything?"

"Well, I'll run over and look at them. I could use some towels and perhaps napkins."

Food, plenty of delicious food, wines, laughter, merriment. Everyone was happy. Business was fine, everybody making money, much money, and prospects of more money! National Motors working in two shifts, turning out thousands of motors, day and night; Muskenaw Iron Foundry, the innumerable factories and other plants all busy, all turning in money! What mattered it if millions of men were butchering each other across the ocean? What mattered it that the youth, the talent, the genius of the world were slaughtered? They were fools to fight. But meanwhile, cash in on it. Make money! Make money while you can! If you don't, the next fellow will.

"Take my advice," thus Israel, enormous cigar in mouth, puffing luxuriously after his dessert. "Hang on to your Brunswick. It's going up. You'll see --"

"Miriam, your dinners are so delicious . . ."

"Happy birthday, Kopel . . ."

"Many happy returns of the day, Kopel . . ."

"We'll all go to the beach to-morrow, yes? The first outing --"

Loud, excited, hoarse cries from the street. Kopel arose and went over to the open window.

"Xtra! Xtra! War Declared! War Declared!"

II

Muskegon thrived under the grilling impetus of war.

The National Motor Works sweated in three shifts, its huge, monstrous machines never ceasing their work for a minute of the day. The Iron Foundry was a caldron of incessant white heat, and even in the cool twilight of the evening, you saw its steady, malevolent glow in the distance. The stores did a fine business, for the workers, imported from Chicago and the East, earned big wages. . .

Liberty Loan Drives. Speakers gesticulating earnestly on the street corners. Soldiers home on leave, shattered in nerves, minus limbs, heroically addressing enthusiastic women's clubs, aiding Liberty Loan Drives. Fight for your country! *Make the World Safe for Democracy!* Buy Liberty Bonds, War Savings Stamps, help the War Chest Drives! Hooverize: meatless days, wheatless days, sugarless days! Everywhere, women carrying huge, cretonne bags, constantly knitting shapeless things out of dead-colored yarn. Red Cross Headquarters filled with debutantes and dowagers rolling bandages and smoothing their uniforms. . . Do your bit! German spies. Parades. Send the boys off with a smile. . .

More speakers shouting on the corners, vying with each other, in the effort to sell the most bonds. ''Over the Top'' -- great book, everybody reading it. More War Savings Stamps and Hooverized days. Blue stars in shining, well-kept windows. Blue stars in dirty, unkempt windows. Factories grinding day and night; laborers leaving the plants so exhausted they could hardly stand. . . Stores open until midnight. ''It can't last the war. Not even another month.'' Influenza, grim, hungry reaper. More blue stars in windows.

And sown everywhere around the town, from the opulent Muskenaw Avenue to the unpretentious Ottowa Street -- gold stars. Gold stars in blind windows. . . *Make the World Safe for Democracy*. . .

III

Israel in Europe. Hungry and wretched. Driven from city to city, from village to village by Denikin's raiders. *Pogroms*. Blood. Blood. Blood.

Israel in the trenches. In the Russian trenches, in the French trenches, in the English trenches, in the Belgian, Italian, and and American trenches.

Israel decorated with medals and ribbons -- and shrouds.

Israel Challanty -- formerly of Krinock, near Brodno-on-the-Nemen, Poland, and now a citizen of Muskenaw, Michigan, in the United States of America, speculating heavily in stocks, reaping incredible profits from the sales in his clothing store, selling many of his houses during an unexpected real estate boom -- making money, money, money -- and buying Liberty Bonds! *Make the World Safe for Democracy!*

IV

For the dozenth time, Leon glanced at the gold watch on his wrist. It was past two. He turned on the light in Lotta's bedroom and sat down near the open window. He unfastened the collar of his pajama coat and loosened his robe. The night air brushed sweet, cooling fingers across his hot skin, but failed to soothe the irritation of his mind.

This was the third successive night that Lotta was in the company of a young officer who had charge of the recruiting in Muskenaw. Leon hated him. He was tall and dark and coppery, like an Indian. Just the type to appeal to Lotta. Still -- Leon smiled bitterly as he faced the truth -- Lotta didn't exactly cling to one type. Any man who was the least bit attractive physically and who knew how to flatter could get her for the night. As he stared into the darkness, Leon speculated with an almost dispassionate interest upon the number of men who had possessed his wife since he married her.

Well, to-night he would settle with her for good. He would show her once for all that her philandering must cease! It was bad

enough that their marriage was a farce -- the joke of the town -- but she couldn't go on making a fool of him. It must stop right now!

Restlessly he paced up and down the shadowed room. He stumbled against a footstool and kicked it viciously out of his way. Finally, at three o'clock, he slouched down in front of the window again, and stared into the dark, silent street.

His life with Lotta had commenced so auspiciously and ended so disastrously. She had taken him in, all right, the little slut. Had made him believe that she was innocent and virtuous -- And yet, he wouldn't have minded her lies -- he could easily have forgiven her youthful indiscretions, if only she had played fair after marriage -- But she was rotten all the way through -- And still, he kept on loving her. . . Be honest with yourself, he thought, you don't love her, you only want her body to caress, to sleep with. . . But what is love? . . .

He stared stupidly out of the window. Like tarnished silver fish the stars swam in a bowl of midnight blue. The apple-blossoms of the tree by the window intimated a fresh, physical perfume which nevertheless was free from voluptuousness. Where was she? When was she coming home? He'd show her once for all. Lotta. Lotta. . .

At three-thirty, he heard the soft, slow tread of a machine pawing the street. He leaned out of the window. Lotta and the young officer. He was kissing Lotta's hand and she was smiling at him. Leon could discern the glint of her white teeth in the moonlight. Although he had witnessed that identical scene on many soul-wracked occasions, Leon could not turn his head away. He *had* to see the officer kiss her on the mouth. He had to suffer that horrible, agonizing pain again. His eyes were glued in fascination to the couple. For a moment they stood still, suspended, like two waxen images gilded by the dying moonbeams. Leon held his breath, the suspense choking him. Then the officer leaned over the ripe red mouth. Leon sobbed, "God damn her! God damn them both to hell!" but he could not draw his eyes away.

At last, he heard her slow, cautious tread on the stairs. He straightened his shoulders.

Carefully, she entered the room and turned on the lights of the tiny porcelain lamps on her dressing table. Not even their diffused rose glow could soften the brittle lines of dissipation that coerced her features. Slipping the coat from her shoulders, she picked up a hand mirror and scrutinized her countenance, smoothing a plump wet finger over her eyebrows. Then she saw Leon.

She turned to him belligerently. "What're you doing here, now?"

"Waiting for you to come home."

They were fencing with each other again, he thought wearily, with words. Words -- sharp, pricking things that tricked you and left you defenseless.

He said with a sudden, new-found decisiveness: "Lotta, you're going to quit playing with men."

She laughed. The sound of her high, shrill derision grated on his already taut nerves. With hands clenched so tightly that the nails bit into his soft flesh, he watched her sit down before her dressing table and draw the bracelets off her wrists and the pearls from her throat.

The whiteness of her neck held him fascinated. He could not take his eyes from it. Slowly he advanced toward her.

In the mirror she saw him coming. The rigid expression of his face frightened her. She started to scream, but her cry died into a breathless gurgle. Leon's hungry fingers spanned her neck. He breathed heavily, spasmodically, as he watched the contortions of her plump, painted face. Her eyes bulged. He tried to loosen the grip of his fingers, but they refused to obey the dictates of his will. He seemed powerless to move, his fingers buried deeply in the flesh of her neck. A shudder. A convulsion. She lay motionless.

In a daze, Leon removed his hands and held them before him. They were trembling. He stood looking at her blankly. His eyes refused to focus or his mind to function. He walked to the window and stared out into the cool, impenetrable depths of the night. He returned to the figure lying crumpled up like a sawdust doll in the chair, and gazed down at it.

Suddenly, he cowered and broke down. He stumbled to his knees and began to smooth the blond hair, mumbling endear-

ments, "Lotta, darling, wake up! Lotta . . ." Frantically, he rubbed her cold hands. "I'll let you go anywhere, with anyone you want -- only wake up and speak to me! Lotta --"

Realization shattered his nerve. Lotta was dead. He had killed her. Now her soft, silky flesh that had so excited his senses was cold -- clay. They would put her in the ground, the damp, ugly, smelly ground, where he couldn't touch her yellow hair any more, or kiss her warm, red lips -- And then they would come for him --

Scarcely aware of what he was doing, he rushed into his own room and threw off his pajamas. Quickly, he slipped into his clothes, and snatching a soft felt hat from a chair, hurried down the stairs and out of the house. He strode down the street at a frantic pace. He was running away -- running away from the piece of clay that had been Lotta. He had killed Lotta. He had killed Lotta. He must get away. He couldn't stand looking at that cold thing. . . That couldn't have been Lotta . . . . ever. . . There was a mistake somewhere. . .

From the distance he heard the shriek of a locomotive tearing cruelly into the bowels of the dark night. Instinctively he turned toward the station. The milk train, that must be. Peering nervously about him, he slunk into a back coach and huddled in a seat.

"Tickets, please!"

He started up nervously. He fumbled in his pocket for his wallet and stuck a bill in the conductor's hand. The train rumbled along at a slow pace, stopping with a monotonous regularity that drove him to distraction. Suddenly, he wondered if Lotta would be lonesome without him. If she would miss him. He thought of her warm, pulsating body and red mouth. He recalled her sweetness in the early days of their marriage. How lovely she had been then! How kind. Of course, she would miss him. He must turn back. He arose and stumbled into the aisle. The conductor intercepted him.

"We're not there, yet, Mister. Another ten minutes."

With fugitive nervousness, Leon sank back in his place. The red plush seats smelled of foul tobacco and cinders. He leaned his head back and closed his eyes. His temples throbbed madly. Little demon hammers were pounding at the base of his skull. He could stand the evil smell of the coach no longer. A wave of nausea

wrenched his stomach. He arose and tottered to the door. The conductor shouted:

"Gr'nd Rap'ds! Graaand Raaapids!"

He walked into the deserted depot. He wandered around inanely, staring at stragglers. He wondered where he could rest. Through the fog of his mind, he groped for the words of the train crier: "Next train -- Chicago -- track --" He followed the group heading for the tracks.

Once aboard the train, he tried to rest, but the wheels churned a circle of memories through his fatigued mind: First meeting with Lotta at the football dinner. . . Pink tulle and blond curls. . . *Everybody's doing it, doing it, doing it*. . . Their marriage and the kid. . . How he had loved the kid, before . . . And the quarrels -- But he must forget the quarrels -- Lotta, darling Lotta, be good to me . . ."

Lotta couldn't be dead. How could he live without her? It was all a horrible dream. When he awoke, she would be there. . . "Lotta, I won't nag about men any more -- Do anything you like, I won't stand in your way, darling. I'll buy you new diamonds and another car -- Only talk to me, talk to me! You're not dead, Lotta, no, no! Wait for me, I'm coming right back . . ."

When he awoke, it was noon and the train was steaming into Chicago. He stared around him in bewilderment. Then realization burst upon him, flooded him, and he buried his face in his arms. Lotta was dead. He had killed her. And he could not live without her. For him there was nothing left in life. Only emptiness. Wearily he climbed off the train and straggled toward the station. He bumped into several hurrying porters who stopped to curse him roundly. His eyes were blurred. He walked blindly. At last, he concentrated his attention upon two men standing near a huge, bright sign. They were dressed in brown uniforms and sported little stripes on their arms. The poster read: *Fight for Your Country! MAKE THE WORLD SAFE FOR DEMOCRACY!*

Leon walked up to them.

V

The following months of Leon's life were as nightmarish as a cubistic cinema. Examinations and tests. Swarms of awkward men in ill-fitting uniforms. Weary hours of drill. Sleeping like the dead at night, after the torture of physical exercise. Unused muscles groaning with pain. No time to think. Too tired to think. Traveling East. Embarkment. Accustomed to physical comfort and cleanliness, the squalor of the boat was a horror to him. . . Seasick. Then battle-scarred France and the front-line trenches.

Leon did not mingle with the other men. They, in turn, considered him queer -- slightly demented. At first, some thought him a coward, but after they saw his behavior under fire . . .

When he procured a leave and went to Paris, he got drunk every day of the fortnight and came back physically debauched. Although he ached to forget, he relived the scene of Lotta's death nightly. He was a murderer. He had killed Lotta. He knew that time softens all pain yet it refused to help him. His conscious moments were nightmares. He commenced to drink with a grave and methodical regularity. Anything to forget. . .

He liked the roar and the tumult of battle, the thunder of the howitzers, the bursting of shrapnel, the *zoom* of the planes. He couldn't think, then. He obeyed orders automatically. And in the confusion of deafening noise, it was easier to forget for a moment. He went over the top in a daze. He went through the months of active warfare in a daze.

Again and again, he volunteered for dangerous missions. Twice he was cited for gallant action in battle. And he came through physically unscathed. It was miraculous, and ironic. The more he sought escape from life, the more death eluded him. He saw men killed right and left, but though he put himself directly in the path of fire, Fate teased him maliciously. He lost weight appallingly and his eyes burned with a febrile brilliance; except for the times when he was under the influence of liquor, at which moments his nerves were as taut as violin strings, he was slack and stupidly unconscious of his surroundings, buried in a world of his own, torturing himself in reliving the scene. . .

The news of a possible armistice brought him no surcease from his pain. On the contrary, it intensified his unease, his torment. The thought of returning to America terrified him. Where could he go? Return to Muskenaw -- to the ashes of his former life? -- The very thought sent a shudder through his body. With Lotta dead, and he her murderer, there was nothing left for him. He was a fugitive from justice. For the first time the real significance of the fact struck him. If he returned to Muskegon, they would arrest him and put him on trial. Headlines: He was the murderer of his wife. He could remain in New York or go to Chicago, but always they would be looking for him. Always he would be a fugitive. Always, he would be branded -- in his own heart -- as the murderer of Lotta. . . Yet, here in France, he had murdered, too. . .

Immediately after the Armistice, he applied for admission to the French Foreign Legion. Africa -- Soudan -- anywhere but America. . .

XIII

BRONX PARADE

I

He was short and curly-haired, with enormous dark eyes and a persuasive mouth. He reeked of cheap tobacco.

"Well, whadya say, kid?" he asked.

Teresa did not answer immediately. She pretended to be absorbed in the ties which she was putting back into the showcase. He wasn't bad, this Wop who was trying to date her up, really sort of good-looking, but the old man would raise Cain if he discovered she was hanging around with fellows from the Works -- especially Italians.

"It's a swell dance, Kid. You'll have a nice time --"

"Yeh, but the old man'll be sore, if he finds out --" Teresa intended to go, but she enjoyed prolonging the conversation.

"Can't you get out of the house without them seeing you?"

"Maybe --" uncertainly.

The dark youth leaned across the counter and patted her hand. "Sure you can --" persuasively. "Come on, be a sport!" he urged. "You'll have a swell time --"

"Well --"

He picked up his package and change. "I'll be waiting on the corner near the Court House at nine o'clock. S'long."

Teresa dawdled at the counter, arranging and rearranging merchandise. Then, languidly, she walked back to the office and powdered her nose with a puff not overly clean.

"Whata life!" she mourned. "Whata life!"

The old man was the richest Jew in town. Everybody knew that

he was lousy with money, yet she had to sit in the store day in and day out, waiting on customers, answering business letters, obeying the old man, taking insults from the brothers -- God, it wasn't right!

Look at the Rabenstein girls -- Henry Rabenstein didn't have one half the money her father possessed -- but their home was simply wonderful and they kept a colored maid, and the girls were always going to Chicago for their clothes and to Grand Rapids for parties and the new shows. And they went out to the Country Club, where Jews were not liked but tolerated -- and belonged to the new Women's Club. While, she, the best she could do was to go out to a public dance with a greasy little Italian. On the sly.

If only she could get away! Sophie had escaped the rut by marrying. But she -- bitterly, Teresa admitted to herself that no man wanted to marry her. These fellows from the Works, who were customers in the store, were anxious to take her out for an evening's fun because she was a good little dancer and not adverse to a little loving. But the Jewish boys -- well, never had any of the Roses or the Rabensteins or the Goldbergs tried to date her up. . .

If only she could get away to the city -- not Grand Rapids or even Chicago. She wanted to outdo the other girls of Muskenaw -- go them one better: New York!

Breath-taking, incredible thought! New York. New York. City of promise and romance. Vicariously, she knew all about New York -- for she attended the "movies" religiously.

She did not know what she would do in the city. But she was not afraid. Something would turn up. She knew that she could stand Muskenaw no longer.

Recently, a traveling salesman had told her that he couldn't stand even a week in a burg like Muskenaw. And he a man!

II

Having made up her mind to leave for New York, Teresa went ahead with her plans. She resolved that nothing would stand in her way. Ma wouldn't say much. Ma generally let the children do as they wished. The old man -- well, he would kick because he needed

her in the store, but him she would tell that she was going on a vacation. Never in her life had she been farther than Grand Rapids and it was time that she took a trip. Oh, she'd get around him somehow.

The old man had a stepsister living in New York. Sometimes, she wrote him letters, but he seldom answered. Afraid she'd touch him for money, Teresa thought. To this aunt she dispatched a note, writing that she planned a trip to the East and hoped to see her relatives at that time; she received a prompt reply urging her to stay with them during her New York visit.

The old man proved less of a problem than she expected. "All right, you can go. But remember, I'll take the expenses out of your wages every week, when you come back --"

"All right, Pa --" she acquiesced, secretly gloating over her plans. Come back! Not if she could help it!

Pretty clothes, always a love with her, now became a passion. Like a greedy squirrel, she hoarded garments in her trunk: silk stockings and underclothes, brassieres, chemises and bloomers out of bright, artificial silks; gay handkerchiefs; beads for her thin neck; earrings -- all for her trip to New York! Each night she left the store with her pockets and the bosom of her dress bulging with the garments and trinkets she had purloined. Kopel no longer scolded, when he caught her. Kopel had always been a quiet fellow, but since Leon was gone he talked less than ever. He didn't seem to be interested in the store so much, either . . . Teresa thought: he must miss Leon terribly. . .

The old man allowed her to take three dresses from the store. "I'll pay you for them, honest I will, Pa --" She helped herself to two hats and several pairs of shoes. Admiring her wardrobe, she gloated, "It sure will look swell -- this coat and hat and this dress --"

During the final weeks of her preparation, she was keyed up to a buoyant pitch, but on the morning she left, she experienced a temporary mood of sadness. It was caused by Ma. There was something in Ma's face as she bade Teresa good-by that made the girl wince. Poor Ma. How she had aged of late! She was taking Leon's disappearance to heart. In a sudden impulse of pity, Teresa

threw her arms around her mother's shoulders and kissed her tenderly.

"Don't worry, Ma. I'll be all right --"

"Teresa --" Teresa turned around. It was the kid, Mattie, calling. "Teresa, don't forget to bring me something nice from New York. And don't forget Goldie --" Teresa stifled an impulse to laugh. Wasn't that just like Mattie? To ask her to bring a gift to Goldie, the crazy old woman who helped Ma with the housework. . .

"Good-by, Ma! Good-by, everybody! Good-by --"

III

Grand Central bewildered her. Never in her life had she seen so many people. All rushing about frantically. Dark porters carrying smart luggage. Questioning, gesticulating mobs crowding the Information Booth. And hurrying back and forth, tall men, short men, young men, old men. Slender women, fat women, tall and short women. The mingled odor of many scents, ranging from Woolworth's *Special* to *Narcisse Noir* dizzied her senses. The decisive *tap tap* of high, slim heels, the staccato *beat beat* of medium, sensible heels, the slow *shuffle shuffle* of low, comfortable heels ate hungrily, torturously into her weary brain. Perplexedly, she looked around her.

A short, plump girl, dressed in a pathetic caricature of the current fashion, approached her. "'Scuse me, are you T'resa Challanty?"

"Yes!" She stepped forward eagerly. A friend in this sea of strange faces.

"I'm your cousin Ida --"

With a smile, Teresa linked her hand with the plump one of her cousin.

"You look just like the picture you sent us," Ida confided. "I recognized you right away."

The family of Wiener, consisting of an overworked father, an obese mother, two small, rowdy sons and three plump daughters of which Ida, who worked down town in a stenographic capacity,

was the oldest, lived in a stuffy five-room flat on Southern Boulevard in the East Bronx. Teresa was not impressed with them. They were a poor sort of relatives to have and she divined that through them she would meet no interesting people -- not even to herself did Teresa admit that she had come to the city in search of a man -- but she decided that it would be best to be cordial to them as long as she needed them. . .

"How about going out to-night, if you aren't too tired --" Ida suggested, as she helped Teresa unpack her clothes.

"No, I'm not tired --" Teresa unwrapped her evening slippers and stuck them in a drawer in the oak dresser.

"We'll go to a dance, yeh? Down on the B'lvard and 163rd Street there's a swell dance hall. You meet a nice crowd there."

"All righty, let's go!" With great anticipation, Teresa looked forward to her first night in the city.

On Saturday night, Southern Boulevard is a miniature Broadway. The "movie" houses are jammed -- long, impatient lines waiting in front of them; the streets are congested with slowly moving crowds and traffic; the stores are busy. Teresa was entranced. Never had she seen the approach of such delightful bustle and confusion and activity.

She wanted to walk through the streets slowly to watch the crowds and stare in the shop windows, but Ida urged her on.

"We can do that to-morrow," she said, guiding her companion into the vestibule of *Danceland*.

After checking their outer garments, they walked into the ladies' room, not unconscious of the speculating eyes of the men lounging about.

"Lemme take your puff." Teresa handed the bit of pink fluff to Ida, who rubbed it vigorously over her face. "You can use some more rouge, Tess, you're kinda pale."

Teresa scrutinized herself in the mirror. She saw a thin young woman with too-sharp features and black eyes that darted nervously about in her pale face. She added two circles of rouge to her make-up and this, together with her heavy black brows, whitened nose, and overly carmined mouth, lent her a slightly grotesque appearance.

"You look swell," Ida complimented her. "I bet you won't have to sit out a single dance."

As they were entering the hall, the perspiring orchestra, made up of disillusioned young artists, struck up a pulsating, half-barbaric tune. In a minute the slippery dance floor was peppered with syncopating couples. Uncertainly, the two girls stood still near the door for a second. Then, a tall lanky youth descended upon them and held out his arms to Ida. She stepped into them, calling to Teresa, "Meet you here after the dance --"

Feeling deserted and lost, Teresa sat down on one of the stiff chairs. She trembled visibly and her panic grew. Suppose she lost track of Ida and had to go home alone -- She didn't even know where the Wieners lived. . .

Why didn't some fellow come up and ask her to dance? Most of the girls were already on the floor and of the remaining ones she was undoubtedly the best looking. Why had Ida been grabbed up right away? Did she, Teresa, look like a little hick or something? . . .

She sat up stiffly, trying to hide her self-consciousness under a mask of boredom. When, toward the end of the dance, a pimple-faced youth asked her to join him, she sprang up eagerly. They swung into the intricacies of a fox trot. In following a difficult step, she stumbled, and blushed painfully.

"Dance *colleege?*" her partner asked superciliously.

"Yes!" She explained, eagerly apologetic, "You see, I come from the West and out there the fellows I know dance different --"

Fortunately, at that moment the music ceased and Teresa walked back toward the entrance, her eyes scanning the crowd for Ida. Suddenly, in relief, she spied her with two men in tow.

"Oh, look, Tess! Here are two fellows I know! They're going to take us home --"

Both men were short and thickset, but Teresa was instantly impressed with the dark one, Max Gold. She thought him exceptionally handsome, with his sleek black hair and full face and small mustache. However, as he appeared to be more interested in Ida, she turned her attentions to the blond Harry Cohen.

After the dance, they went into an ice cream parlor and ordered

plates of ice cream, heaped with syrups and nuts, giggling over the names of the dishes. "I'll have a Merry Widow Special Sundae," Ida decided, not the least abashed by Max's admonition, "You'll get fat if you don't watch out!" They dawdled over the ice cream, eating slowly, licking their spoons, and teasing one another.

The girls did not fall asleep until dawn. They were busy discussing Teresa's first day in the city. "What does this fellow, Max, do?" Teresa inquired with apparent casualness.

"Salesman, I think. Children's boys."

Monday evening, Max Gold telephoned and asked to speak with Teresa. Her heart beating wildly, she ran to the hall telephone.

"Hello --"

"This is Max, kid -- Max Gold -- you remember me --"

"I sure do!"

"What about a little stepping tonight?"

"Just a minute, I'll ask Ida --"

"Never mind Ida -- this is a lonesome -- just you an' me --"

Ida, who was standing near the telephone and listening in to the conversation, nudged her to acquiesce. "Sure go! He'll show you a good time." Ida was not selfish.

When Max came to call for her that evening, he found her vivaciously ready.

"Some glad rags!" he joked, but admiration and speculation filled his eyes. "Must have cost you a pile --"

"Oh, Pa gets all my things for me in Chicago --"

"Is that so!"

They rode down town on the subway, which was crowded. Teresa put her handkerchief delicately to her nose. "These crowds --" she explained to Max. "I'm not used to being in crowds."

"Well, what do you do at home --"

"Oh, when we drive into Grand Rapids, we use one of our own cars --" Teresa was enjoying herself immensely. She could see that Max was impressed.

"Oh, you don't say so!" He continued, "Ida told me your father has a store --"

"Oh, that's just one of the things he has. He lets the boys run

the store, 'cause with all his property and stocks to take care of, he hasn't got the time."

"Go on! You don't mean it!"

"Sure I do!"

Within a fortnight, Teresa exultantly began to look upon Max Gold as her own. He telephoned her every night -- knowing the usual time he called, she answered the telephone herself, so that Ida would have no opportunity to speak with Max -- and he took her out three and four times a week. Obviously, he was in love with her.

"Look," her aunt remarked slyly. "There are girls who live in the Bronx all their lives and can't get a man. You have been here only two weeks and already you got one."

Teresa smiled in satisfaction.

IV

In a month, she returned to Muskegon. In the company of her husband, Max Gold.

Her entrance into Muskenaw was one of triumph. She had shown them! She had put one over on the Rabensteins and the Roses and the others -- There wasn't a man in Muskenaw who could compare in looks to her Max!

Ma was happy to see them and made her delight apparent. She prepared a lovely dinner for the young couple and made a great fuss over them. The old man was more casual. He shook hands with Max and asked him what business he was in and how much money he had. He was distant and businesslike, and Teresa was furious. But she was wise and experienced enough in the old man's ways to say nothing. The brothers were very cold and looked at Max as if he were a new sort of animal. Teresa knew that they were laughing at him.

The following morning, Teresa took him over the town and showed him her father's property. The store and the numerous houses and other buildings. And the plant of the National Motors. "Pa's a big stockholder there --"

On the third evening after their arrival, Israel inquired of his new son-in-law, "What do you plan to do?"

Teresa answered for him. "Why, we thought Max could work in the store. He's a swell salesman, aren't you, Maxie?"

The old man said, All right, he'd give him a chance -- but the brothers were less amiable. Obviously, they didn't want Max hanging around the store and they made his first days' so disagreeable that he refused to work there. "They're skunks," he told Teresa and she agreed with him.

But Israel was insistent. Max must go to work. If he couldn't agree with the brothers in the store, he must find a job elsewhere. Certainly, he, Israel, couldn't afford to keep the two of them in the house, without receiving payment for board and room.

"Your rich father --" Max jeered and Teresa was silent. Inwardly, however, she was smiling in satisfaction. Max couldn't leave her now, even if he did know how stingy the old man was! She was his wife!

V

Bessie Challanty (sipping hot black coffee): "Isreal, you should do something for Tessie's husband. You didn't give her a dowry --"

Israel: "Dowry! Dowry! A dowry she needed, yet, to get *him* for a husband!"

Bessie (placatingly): "It ain't so bad as you make it out, Israel, he's a nice, quiet, honest boy. Such a year I should have! Give them a few dollars a present and let them start a business --"

Israel: "All right! All right! Don't bother me no more. I'll give them some money! -- I ain't got enough worries on my head, yet, without supporting another good-for-nothing! What will he do with the money, anyway? Gamble it away -- wait, you'll see --"

Bessie (pleadingly): "Israel, Tessie is your daughter -- you should look out for her --"

Israel: "All right! All right! But wait, you'll see yet --"

VI

Saturday afternoon on Western Avenue. Congested traffic. The sidewalks overflowing with shoppers.

He stood on the corner of Jefferson Street and Western Avenue, short, thickset, handsomely dressed, a box of rubber dolls at his feet. A crowd of children had collected around him.

"Here y'are! Rubber novelty doll! Direct from Paris! Quarter a piece!" With his thumb, he pressed the rubber doll's middle and her tongue jerked out delightfully. The children clapped their hands and laughed. "Cute, eh? Yessir! Well, whadya say! Quarter a piece! Quarter a piece! Novelty doll direct from Paris! Here y'are!"

Teresa, standing beside him, was hot with shame. They were all looking at him, she thought, all the passersby who knew her, and saying: "Old Challanty's son-in-law standing on the street, peddling . . ."

Business was slow. At last, in disgust, Max picked up his rubber dolls and quit. "Heluva family, you've got," he grumbled. "Heluva family --"

She walked beside him in silence, hanging tightly to his arm. "Gosh, but I'm sick of this joint. I'm gonna get out. Me for li'le ole New York again --"

"Oh, Maxie --" fearfully.

"Yeh! You can come with me, if you wanna, or stick by your lousy family --"

"I'll come with you, Maxie . . ."

. . . . . .

Israel to Bessie: "Nu, what did I tell you, heh? I give them hard-earned money and do they invest it in a sensible business? No! Rubber novelties -- and the rest they spend on a trip to New York again. Not another cent do they get from me, you hear, not another cent! --"

XIV

HOUSE OF CLOUDS

I

Gregory lived in a world of his own.

From his first conscious moments of the mundane, through the years when he chopped wood and ran errands for his mother and later clerked at the store for his father, Gregory's thoughts centered in the shell of this vividly abstract world of his own, which made his material life infinitely more bearable to him.

His earliest recollection was of pain -- a horrible, overwhelming devastation of pain that threatened to choke him, to leave him prostrate and gasping for breath the minute he closed his eyes. They used to put hot compresses on his neck, and the steam arising from the cloths created a filmy veil between him and the outer world and tortured him with grotesque and incredible shadows, which terrified him and made him want to cry out in fear. Then, a low, hoarse, tearing moan would issue from his throat and he would cough sputteringly for air.

He was the first of the Challanty children to give Bessie any trouble. The others went through the customary children's ailments with a stoic and hardy indifference. Only Gregory suffered acutely, and consequently he was regarded by his older brothers with an amused contempt, and considered by all a weakling and a "sissie."

Seldom did anyone pay attention to him. Ma was invariably so busy that it seemed to Greg she never rested for a minute. Sometimes, she used to eat standing up, swallowing snatches of food between ironing or mending or serving the family their meals.

At first, Gregory used to follow her around like a pup, clutching her skirt with grubby fingers and dragging himself by it, but finally she sent him off, complaining that he was a nuisance and continually in the way. That hurt Gergory very much, and when he was set out to play in the back yard, he cried. He was so alone and bewildered when he was away from Ma. . .

When Ma was too busy to prepare his food, Sophie took care of him, feeding him -- she always pushed the spoon deep into his mouth, which caused him to gag -- and dressing him. Gregory feared and hated Sophie. All of her movements were so unrestrained and rough! She never smoothed his hair, like Ma did, but combed it quickly, seldom stopping to untangle the snarls, but pulling at the hair cruelly until it all came out. When she dressed him, she swooped his clothes over his head, sticking his arms in the wrong places and hurting him generally. And when he protested, she slapped him over the mouth, and set him out in the yard to play alone.

One day, he discovered some old magazines that had been thrown away in the yard. They were yellowed and smelly, but bursting with entrancing nudes of figures. After that, Gregory was never lonesome. He toddled into the barn on a second exploring trip and found another pile of papers which he had seen the older boys discard. He tore the photographs out of the sheets and played with them, talking to them and crooning over them. At night, he hid the pictures under a broken step on the back porch, using infinite precautions to guard them. For to him, the paper dolls were the most precious things in the world, constituting in this realm of nebulous make-believe his only friends, his only companions.

Then, one afternoon, Teresa saw him at play, talking to the paper creatures, caressing them. She teased him and made fun of him, calling him "baby." The following morning, when Gregory went to rescue his paper dolls from their bed under the broken step, he found that they had disappeared. . .

After that painful incident, he went back to his mother, but again she had no time for him. Already there were younger children to be nursed and it was not long before Gregory was

ordered to mind the babies -- which command he obeyed in only a half-hearted fashion. He would have liked the older fellows, Kopel and Leon, but they were seldom aware of his existence.

When he grew older, Leon occasionally took him along on his Sunday afternoon walks, and Gregory loved being with him. But after a time, Leon appeared to tire of his company and ceased inviting him. Then, Gregory picked up the courage to ask,

"Goin' out for a hike t'day, Leon?"

And Leon, turning aside, answered absently, "No, I guess not, kid."

But later, Greg saw him leave the house with a package of sandwiches wrapped in an old newspaper, and knew where he was going. He never asked Leon after that. Gregory was a sensitive youngster; he wouldn't hang around where he wasn't wanted.

As he grew older, he became accustomed to his loneliness. The knowledge that the other members of the family did not like him ceased to torment him. Kopel and Leon were always together, Danny and Barnett, Sophie and Teresa, and the youngest boy, Asher, with the little girl, Mattie. Only he was alone. None of the others shared their secrets with him. None of them really played with him.

At first, their lack of interest in him was a constant source of agony. He used to go to bed praying that his brothers and sisters would like him, and play with him as they did with each other. He imagined himself dead. Then they would all be sorry that they had treated him so shabbily and they would all stand around his bed and cry to him: "Wake up, Greg! We're awful sorry we hurt you -- we'll play with you now, and let you be chief an' everything --" But, somehow, his dreams never materialized.

He sank deeper into the dream world of his own construction. The figments of his fancy tightened their clasp upon him. Eventually, there came a time when he preferred solitude and his dream friends to physical playmates. He used to sit for hours, holding seances with the creatures of the make-believe, confiding to them, scolding them, advising them. To him, they were absolutely real, so that often he repeated to his family their conversations, describing in minute detail their appearances and

idiosyncrasies. He was a starved, lonely child, driven by a tormenting uncertainty which he could not understand or define, and it was only in the world of his imagination that he found surcease from the unrelenting inconsideration of his brothers and sisters.

"Gregory is an awful little liar," the family said. "Something should be done about it."

II

The last band concert of the season was held on the evening before Labor Day.

On that night, Stackley Park was packed with people, its benches overflowing with men, women and children. Young couples sauntered in the shadow of the dark bushes or sat on the shining black cannons. Children ran across the lawn, bruising the grass with their sharp, impetuous heels. Lonely men squatted on the paper-littered verdure and looked about hopefully for stray girls. The air was warm, but tinged with an occasional stiff breeze that portended the coming of autumn. The entire scene was animated with a lively, unhampered gayety that bespoke the climax of the summer season. To-morrow, everybody would be back on the job, beginning the labor that durated through the long, dreary winter. . . Meanwhile be happy! be gay! the music seemed to say; this is your last chance! . . .

The National Motors Band furnished the music. For the most part, the band was made up of Hungarians and Italians from the Works. The president of the National Motors had imported a band leader from Detroit, an American who had studied in New York.

"You've got to hand it to these foreigners," the new *koppelmeister* remarked. "They don't know a thing about technique, but they certainly *feel* music . . ." In the winter, the band used to practice in the Elks Hall two evenings a week, and invariably a mob of children collected downstairs and listened to them.

Now the band was attired in its best uniform -- which generally was reserved for parades and banquets, but used to-night in honor of the last concert -- a rich, deep blue, trimmed with silver braid

and buttons. They looked handsome, those fellows from the Works, as they sat stiffly upright on the platform, under the glaring lights, neatly washed and combed, clothed in their striking outfits. The hearts of many girls beat in tender sympathy with the music. . .

Danny and Barnett were busy. They rushed around and between the crowd like mad ants. Already, they had sold all of their popcorn, and now they were scurrying about, lugging their little stands and squawking, "Shine yer shoes! Shine yer shoes! Penny a shine! Penny a shine!"

Early in the evening, Danny found Greg, his basket of popcorn under one arm and shine-stand under the other, cuddled in the shadow of the bushes, a rapt expression on his dirty face, listening to the music. "Better get busy," he warned Greg. "You know what the old man said --"

Only too well did Gregory know what the old man said.

As they had gathered in the kitchen at suppertime, to pop the corn to sell for the evening's concert, Israel had walked in and warned Gregory: "All summer I let you have your way. You didn't shine no shoes. But to-night, I will have my way. To-night, you shine shoes." He grasped the boy's thin arm and Gregory winced under the pressure of his fingers. "You shine shoes to-night, or I'll know the reason why --"

Slowly, Gregory moved among the crowds.

"Popcorn! Popcorn! Five cents a bag! Popcorn!"

Pricks of heat, like red-hot needles, stabbed his body. Queer, that suddenly he should recall the old, half-forgotten tidal wave of pain that used to drench him and leave him semi-conscious and gasping for breath. He had felt all right during the day -- as a matter of fact, he had gone swimming with Danny and Barnett in Muskenaw Lake that very morning. But now, he felt faint and weak. . . However, the thought of the old man's anger aroused him and he vended his corn.

"Popcorn! Five cents a bag! Popcorn! Here y'are, lady." He handed an enormous woman, whose ample torso was stuffed into a brightly flowered dress and who flaunted a straw hat bearing a garden of fruit, a greasy bag of corn and twenty cents change.

"Hey, come back here "-- He turned around. The woman was eyeing him belligerently. "I gave you fifty cents!"

He stared at her stupidly. She had given him a quarter. Twice, he had looked at it to make certain, for he often mistook a quarter for a half dollar, and vice versa.

"No, lady, you gave me a quarter."

"I gave you fifty cents," she bristled. "You give me another quarter or I'll call a policeman, you little thief --"

A shower of cold perspiration drenched Gregory. He felt that he was in a nightmare, one of those horrible nightmares that had begun to torment him of late. A crowd began to gather and he stared around him like a trapped animal, searching for a hole of escape.

"Pay the lady, you little thief --"

"-- they're regular robbers, those kids who sell popcorn --"

"Oh, you can't trust the little Sheenies --"

Appealingly, he gazed at the inimical faces around him, crowding in on him, but found no trace of sympathy anywhere. Hastily, he dug into his pocket and handed a shining quarter to the enormous ogress. Then he squirmed his way out of the mob and hid in a bush.

He was twenty-five cents short, now. What would the old man say? He would know, for each bag of popcorn was counted and marked before the boys left the house, so that they could not keep any change for themselves. He dared not come home without that quarter. He shuddered. One alternative remained: he could shine shoes. But he wouldn't do that -- he preferred a beating to shining other people's shoes. It was bad enough running around with the popcorn, but the other -- No, he would come home without the quarter. He didn't care what the old man did to him. He could kill him -- at that moment, Gregory was ready for martyrdom -- but he couldn't make him shine shoes. . .

For the remainder of the evening, he sat on the damp ground near the bushes, listening to the music that transported him away to the nebulous and comforting world of his own. Through a haze, he saw Danny and Barnett running around, yelling shrilly. "Shine yer shoes! Shine yer shoes! Penny a shine! Penny a shine!" They

were working hard and when they brought their profits to him, the old man might even praise them, and perhaps give them each a nickel for their pains. Gregory was defiant. He didn't care what happened, any more. The music had awakened the familiar poignant longing in his heart . . . for what? . . . He sat quietly and wove curious and enchanting dreams about himself. . . His blue eyes burned with a hectic, febrile luster. . .

When he became conscious of his surroundings again, the concert was over and the crowds were surging out of the Park, toward Western and Muskenaw Avenues. Hastily, he arose and walked toward the street. He did not search for Danny and Barnett; they seldom waited for him. Besides, he wanted to be alone. He was scarcely conscious of his body. His mind was weaving incredible and entrancing pictures for his pleasure.

Upon reaching home, he peeked through the kitchen window. Ma and the old man were still up. Waiting. Danny and Barnett were sitting around the oilcloth-covered table, wolfing hunks of buttered rye bread and gulping steaming coffee. He entered the room quietly.

"Ah, you're here at last!" the old man drawled, and the boy shivered under the menace of his voice.

"Yeh," Gregory set down the basket, still partially filled with cold, greasy popcorn, and his shoe-shine stand. He took the coins out of his pocket, and walking up to Israel, placed them on the table before him.

Israel counted the money. Then he arose and looked over the bags of corn in the basket. "Humm, you sold twenty bags, but you give me only seventy-five cents --"

"A woman gave me a quarter an' when I gave her change she said she gave me fifty cents --"

"You're a liar --"

Gregory squirmed. Bessie intervened. "You'll talk to him later, Israel," she suggested timidly. "First let him eat --"

"Be quiet --" the old man yelled, "Nobody's asking you." He turned toward the quivering boy again. "And the money from shining shoes?"

"I didn't shine shoes --" Suddenly, Greg took courage. He

stepped closer to the old man and screamed, "I told you I won't shine shoes, an' I won't! You can't make me, even if you lick me, 'cause I won't do it! I wo--"

He did not finish his exclamation of defiance. Challanty caught him by the ear and clapped a hand over his mouth.

"Go upstairs," he ordered Bessie and the two boys.

"Israel, please --"

Challanty turned to his wife furiously. "Do as I say," he commanded, "I'll show him once for all, the loafer -- the good-for-nothing -- I'll teach him --"

Twenty minutes later, when Gregory crawled upstairs to his bed, he was horribly bruised in body, but unshaken in spirit. "You c'n lick me an' lick me, but I won't shine shoes -- You can't make me --"

Without taking his clothes off, he slipped onto his narrow cot. He was too filled with the dreadful physical pain that wrenched at his stomach and nauseated him to undress. He wouldn't cry! He clenched his fists and gritted his teeth and vowed that he wouldn't cry.

And in the morning, as soon as his body stopped aching, he would run away. First, he would kiss Ma good-by, because Ma was really awful good, and then he would get some bread and butter and wrap it in a paper and take some of his books and run away. Anywhere -- just so he wouldn't have to hang around the house and store any more -- And then they'd be sorry, all right --

Gregory slept alone in a tiny cubicle under the roof. The ceiling was unfinished and Gregory stored his books and occasional pennies under the rafters. He had almost a quarter saved up; it was hidden in the rafter opposite the one in which a family of plump mice were nesting. . . In the morning when he felt better, he would take that money and run away. He closed his eyes tight to keep the tears from pouring over his lids. He mustn't cry -- he wasn't a baby. No sir, he mustn't cry. His eyes were hot and blurry and he buried his face in the pillow to shut out the minute flashes of lightning that blinded him.

He had been lying thus for about fifteen minutes, in a semi-conscious state, just drifting off to sleep, when the door of his room

opened quietly. He was too exhausted to look up, but he knew that it was his mother. She always came up to him after the old man had beaten him, and took him into her arms and kissed him and cried over him.

Silently she put down the plate of buttered bread and glass of milk that she carried, and took the covers off him. She helped him undress and get into his nightshirt and then she tucked him in, giving him the bread and milk to eat.

"I can't eat, Ma. Honest, I can't swallow a bite," he whispered.

She replied, "Sonny, you must eat -- it's good for you -- Well, at least, drink the milk."

He gulped down the milk while she sat quietly beside him, smoothing his hair. He shivered. "I'm cold, Ma. Can I have another blanket?"

She covered him warmly and put a pillow on his feet. She did not question his desire for warmth. September nights were apt to be chilly. . . She leaned over and kissed him on the mouth, tenderly. Greg could control himself no longer. He threw his arms around her neck and pulled her down to his breast.

"Ma!" he wailed, and choked down his cry to a whispered sob, "why is he so mean? Huh, Ma?" Then he grew ashamed of his tears and reassured her staunchly, "When I grow up and make a lot of money, Ma, you won't have to work so hard. Ma, wait till I make some money --"

And Bessie's choked, thick-voiced reply, "Money -- don't work for money, Son. It don't bring you anything. You just go on working, working for money -- more money --" her fists doubled in frenzy. "Why? What for? What have I gotten out of money? All the money Israel's made -- What did it bring us -- happiness, health -- no, nothing -- nothing but a love for more money --"

She controlled herself. A fleeting second of silence. Then, she kissed Gregory gently and left the room.

The extra blanket proved to be stiffingly hot and the pillow a devastating weight upon his feet. He felt overcome, crushed down by a terrific pressure. Perspiration streamed over his face and dampened his nightshift. With an effort he kicked off both the pillow and blanket. However, his sign of relief quickly changed to

one of fear, as he found himself shivering. He clenched his teeth, but could not stop them from chattering. He tried to cover himself again, and buried his face in the pillow. The faint yellowish moon poked her finger through the tiny window and the wind played a faint lullaby upon the rafters. Gregory turned over on his side, but the effect of the moonlight was so weird that he pulled the blanket over his head. He tossed about fitfully and it was only after the moon had retreated her stand that he fell into a restless and feverish sleep. . .

When he awoke in the morning, his throat was arid and he could not swallow. He tried to arise, but fell back on his cushion, exhausted. His body was painfully sore; his eyes blurred and twitched. He remained still, swallowing hard to dispel the feeling of suffocation that was overwhelming him. He lay thus until Sophie called from downstairs.

"*Gregory! Gregory!* Get up, you lazy --"

He tried to answer but his throat was tightly closed.

When she came up fifteen minutes later, Sophie found Greg lying inert, his face flushed and his eyes feverishly bright. "You've got a cold," she scolded. "Didn't I tell you not to go swimming yesterday?" They dosed him with castor oil and lemonade and applied hot compresses to his throat, but procured no relief. By night he was tossing feverishly about and mumbling to himself. When Bessie spoke to him, he looked at her blankly, uncomprehendingly.

"Go call Mrs. Rabenstein," she ordered Teresa. In moments of stress, Bessie Challanty was accustomed to leaning on Sarah Rabenstein. Somehow, Henry Rabenstein's wife took charge of a sick room with an efficiency and dexterity that Bessie could never emulate.

When Sarah Rabenstein arrived, she insisted on calling the doctor immediately. "The boy is sick," she said, to Bessie's answer that he had a slight cold. "He has a high fever and that is dangerous to neglect. We must get a doctor right away."

The doctor shook his head gravely after he examined Gregory, and said that he should have been called sooner. He left numerous

prescriptions and went away, promising to call again in the morning.

Sophie sat beside his bed until supper time, and when she left, her place was taken by Teresa. Gregory wished they would both go away. He hated Sophie -- but his feeling for Teresa was one of extreme revulsion. Her beady black eyes and long, pointed nose irritated him. She sat staring at him unblinkingly, for what appeared to him as hours. She reminded him of the mice who nested in the rafters and often sat on the floor watching him steadily. He attempted to tell her to go away, but he could not speak. He couldn't rid himself of the enormous lump in his throat.

After supper Danny and Barnett ran up for a second, but didn't stay. When Bessie asked them to sit with Gregory for a while, they made excuses and ran off. Gregory was hurt, but in a way he was glad, too. He didn't want them around. He didn't want anybody about. He liked being alone with his thoughts.

Just before twilight cast its purple glamour over the shadowed room, Bessie came up to give Gregory his medicine. She sat by his side, holding his long, white hand in her thick palms and smoothing it gently. Greg enjoyed the sensation, even though her skin was like sandpaper. A thrill of love cavorted through his body. Ma was the only one who liked him, who cared about him. Gee, it was nice having her around, even when she was busy and scolded him. . . He dozed off. Not until she was sure that he was asleep did Bessie leave him.

It was midnight when he awoke. Bessie had turned off the gas-light and the cubicle was in darkness, except for a strip of clear moonlight that unrolled across the floor like a shining carpet. Gregory lay still, scarcely breathing. There was an eerie suspension in the room, like a film of magic, almost. Gregory felt that if he were quiet enough, sprites and nymphs would cavort and dance in the air about him. In the rafters, the mice ran about, their tiny feet playing a tattoo that sounded like the melody of miniature drums. Greg thought that he could almost trace a theme in the music of their patter, for invariably it was the same. A fat mouse frolicked up to his bed and sat still, staring at him solemnly. Greg

closed his eyes. The unblinking rodent with its sleekness and beady eyes reminded him of Teresa. . .

A sudden creak disturbed the mouse and he scampered away to safety. Gregory felt, rather than heard, the knob of the door turning. He lay rigid, steel slivers pricking his scalp and spine. He held his breath.

Slowly, the door opened. A short, squat figure in a white garment, holding a tallow candle in hand, stepped forward cautiously. Greg bit his lips to keep from screaming. His body burned and froze by turns. Then he drew a slow breath of relief. It was his father! The old man himself! The old man was coming in to see him!

Israel put the candle on the table and sat down beside Gregory. His round, obese face above the stiff nightshirt was slightly ridiculous, but Gregory, lying with half-closed eyes, did not laugh. He was too overcome with the enormity and unreality of the incident.

He opened his eyes fully and let them rest upon his father's face. Israel did not speak and the boy dared not break the silence. The moon, having swooned into the sable shadows and possessed them, concentrated upon the two inarticulate figures, spinning her web of unreality about them with a detached and glamorous interest. Instinctively, Gregory felt that he should maintain the full stillness.

The old man held out his hand and Greg laid his thin fingers across the fleshy palm. His father clasped them tightly, and they sat thus, in silence. Gregory felt a wave of richness, of serenity wash him clean of all pain. It was like a soothing opiate. He lay relaxed, utterly at peace, in a dreamy lethargy.

"Gregory, you are asleep --?"

"No -- s'all right, Pa --" His heart was warm with forgiveness.

The old man tightened his clasp, and then quite suddenly, before Greg realized what had happened, he was sitting on the bed, his arms clasped about the boy's body, holding him close.

"Gregory --"

"Yes, Pa -- ? --"

"Maybe, you want I should sing for you, eh? Like for a little baby --"

"Yes, Pa . . ."

"A Russian song -- that I used to sing in the old country --"

He commenced to sing, chanting in low, soft accents that melted into Greg's consciousness. The words Greg did not understand, for they were in Russian, but the music of the old man's voice brought him surcease from all bodily pain and transported him into a glowing world of serenity. It was a big feeling, one that he could not wholly grasp, but vaguely he sensed the profundity of his emotion. The low, caressing melody made him dream of silver-swept sand dunes and Lake Michigan on purple twilights and sunsets that were pageants of color so beautiful they caught at your spirit and gave it wings. . . Greg clung to his father tightly, feeling that his heart was full, like a bud that is about to burst into gorgeous bloom. . .

He tried to maintain a hold on his consciousness, but almost imperceptibly his lids closed and he experienced the delightful sensation of drifting away on ether. He felt so light and carefree and gay . . . he was clutching a cloud of variegated and enchanting colors, which seemed to elude him. . .

When he awoke, the sun was pouring a wealth of untarnished gold into the room. He rubbed his eyes. How spicy and pungently sweet the rich autumn air! Its crispness cleared his head. The pain of his body and soreness of throat had disappeared. He was hungry for food -- for a bit of toast and an egg whose yolk would resemble the sunshine, and a cup of steaming cocoa.

Then he recalled the events of the past night and he thrilled with happiness. The old man had come to visit him. That implied that he liked Greg, even though he became irritated when the boy wouldn't obey him. Gregory smiled. He was sharing a secret with his father that no one else knew about. He felt infinitely superior to his brothers and sisters. They couldn't hurt him by their negligence, any more. He was secure in the knowledge that the old man liked him better than the others. . .

He lay quietly through the day, absorbed in his thoughts. At

night, when Bessie came up to sit beside him, he pretended to fall asleep quickly, so that she would leave him alone.

The moment she left, he opened his eyes. He quivered in anticipation. Slowly the minutes crawled by. The gray shadows lengthened, distorted themselves into heavy blacks and patterned the corners of the room. Birds chirped their last chants and the moon strutted out of her cloud garden. She is arrogant to-night, Gregory thought, having recently discovered Oscar Wilde, like a silver peacock, with eyes of black pearl. Her beams are an undulating feather tail coquetting with the rafters of my room. . . Soon -- Gregory trembled -- soon now, he would come in. And hold him in his arms again. And sing to him.

He shut his eyes and relived last evening's pleasure. The old man liked him. The old man liked him. Sweet words! He mouthed them over and over. And soon his father would come in again, slightly ludicrous in his stiff white nightshirt, carrying a flickering candle. He would come; Gregory was certain he would come. He wriggled his toes in anticipation. Soon now. . .

It must be after midnight, he thought. Why didn't he come? His eyes closed, but he jerked them open. He mustn't fall asleep. The old man might enter, and finding him in slumber, walk out again.

Finally, after an interminable stretch of seconds, and minutes, and hours, dawn stroked his pale face with soft, understanding fingers and he fell into an exhausted slumber, his last coherent thought being, "He didn't come . . . didn't come . . . didn't . . ."

Until he was well enough to come down stairs to dine with the family, Gregory did not see his father again. Israel was standing by the kitchen sink, drying his hands on a damp towel. There was no one else in the room. With a beating heart, Gregory walked up to him and laid a shy hand on his arm. However, the smile on his face froze, as Israel pushed him brusquely away, remarking, "Well enough to eat, already, heh?"

Blindly, Greg walked into the dining room. . .

However, he did not feel the hurt as acutely as he might. The old man's remark was in keeping with his character, as Greg had known him all of his life. The other had been a fleeting, incredible and fantastic interlude. Perhaps it hadn't happened at all. Perhaps

he had just imagined it. As time flowed on and he grew older, Gregory came to the conclusion that it had been a dream, that precious moment of understanding, and that he had been the unconscious victim of a high temperature, which had tricked him into a beautiful illusion.

XV

THRENODY FOR LOST DREAMS

I

During his adolescence, it was not school or athletics or even girls that filled Gregory's life -- but books.

School was easy. Gregory soon discovered that by giving his instructors the impression that he knew a great deal, he could get by with actually knowing very little. He did not study, for he considered it a waste of time to spend hours on mathematics or chemistry when he could devote those hours to reading. By listening to the teacher expound the morrow's lesson and by a superficial glance at his text books, he usually mastered a sufficient knowledge of the lesson to convince the world that he did home work. Except for English and Composition, in which he excelled, his marks were scarcely commendable.

From the moment he learned to read, books filled his life. He exchanged the paper idols that were the friends of his babyhood for the fascinating creatures whom he discovered between the leaves of books. The magic of the printed words! Here he regained with greater, with more vivid intensity the thrill of his old dream world! To what wonderful lands books carried you! What marvelous scenes they pictured for you! What loyal and fascinating friends they brought you! What need of people, what need of physical pals, when you had books? . . .

Generally, he read at night, in the loneliness of his raftered cubicle, for the old man was apt to chastise him if he caught him with a book -- "Wasting time, loafer, when you should be in the store!" -- and the others invariably made fun of him and called him

''bookworm.'' He was careful never to leave a book downstairs, for he found through painful experience that the girls -- Sophie or Teresa -- were likely to destroy it by throwing it into the kitchen stove.

From fairy tales he graduated into the Oliver Optic series, following them with breath-taking adventures of those desperadoes conceived in the fertile brains of Frank Merriwell and Nick Carter, and then toned down to the inspiring lives and careers of the plucky young men of Horatio Alger's molding. At his English classes, he received his first taste of the classics, and instantly discarded his old loves, henceforth steeping himself in the Victorians -- Scott, and Dickens, whom he loved particularly, James Fennimore Cooper, Hugo, Verne, Duma, and Poe. Poe fascinated him. Gregory learned many of his poems by heart, chanting them to himself when he was alone, loving their rhythm and macabre themes.

Prowling among the dusty old volumes in the rear of the library one hot lunch hour, Gregory discovered a volume by Herman Melville. He glanced through several pages and became so absorbed in it that he missed the afternoon session of school. It was *Moby Dick*, that thrilling story of whale hunting.

He took the volume out of the library and read it at the supper table. Immediately after he finished eating, his father ordered his son on an errand and Gregory stuck the book under the linen cover of the sideboard. When he returned an hour later, the book was gone.

He asked Sophie, ''Did you see a book lying on the sideboard?''

''No.''

Teresa made the same answer to his query, but he knew that one of them had destroyed it. Hatred surged up in his heart. This wanton despoiling of books! They ought to be whipped, horsewhipped. For the moment he wished he could dig his nails cruelly into their flesh and watch them suffer and bleed, torturing them in turn, as they had tortured his books.

He was worried. For he knew that he would have to recompense the library for the volume, and he had no money. Unless he paid

for the book or returned it, the library and its rich treasures would be locked to him. He commenced saving his pennies.

It was at this time that he wandered into Muskenaw's only second-hand bookshop, which leaned, a one-story, dilapidated shack, on Western Avenue, toward the dock.

Frans Miller, the owner of the bookshop, was reputed to be eccentric. He was a tall, broad-shouldered old man, with powerful stooping shoulders and sharp blue eyes that looked through you, over steel-rimmed spectacles. He wore his thick, yellowish white hair long, and never trimmed his beard. His clothes were soiled and shabby, and his wide-brimmed black felt hat was invariably at the back of his head. Generally, when he ventured into the street, little boys ran after him and called him names and threw stones at him. Whereupon, he brandished his stout cane threateningly at them and they scurried away like mice.

Most of the time he lived among his books, sitting hunched over them in the dim little semi-office at the rear of the dusty store, reading, always reading. A pimple-faced, sandy-haired young clerk took care of the few customers that straggled in and browsed around. Few of Muskenaw's population were given to buying second-hand books. Frans Miller did not rely upon the sale of books to earn his bread-and butter. . .

The tables which stood in front of the shop, piled high with dusty and worn volumes, bearing the sign, *5 cents each*, or the smaller table, *2 for $.25*, fascinated Gregory. He filched time from the store to loiter around the stands. By saving his pocket money religiously, he was able to buy a few books. To house them, he constructed a tiny bookshelf out of boards which he smuggled up to his room.

The lust for the possession of books had seized him at an early age. Each volume he purchased was carefully stored on his tiny shelves. Often, late at night, when he could not sleep, he arose, and lighting the gas, took the books from their places and rearranged them, opening them, fingering their pages tenderly, scanning a passage here and there, in each of his favorites. To Gregory, his books were real -- far more alive than the people with whom he came in daily contact. The feeling of a well-worn cover

between his sensitive fingers, the smell of the printed page, a glance over fine print -- these thrilled him infinitely more than a relationship with physical companions.

Occasionally, he prowled around the interior of the bookshop, a long narrow room the front of which was piled high with books, many dusty and moldy with age, and the back of which was partitioned off into sleeping quarters for Frans Miller.

It was a volume of Voltaire -- an exquisite little leather edition of *Candide* -- which was the means of introducing and fostering a friendship between the boy, Gregory, and the eccentric old bookseller, Frans Miller.

Gregory, having seen the book lying on a lower shelf, was attracted by its beautiful binding. He picked it up and scanned it. After reading a few snatches, he was possessed with the fever of owning it. When the clerk told him the price, three dollars, he laid it down reluctantly. Three dollars was a fortune. He had a quarter in his pocket.

On each successive visit, Gregory looked longingly at the volume. Often fingering it, but always walking away without it. Then one afternoon, after purchasing a copy of *Marius the Epicurean* by Pater -- whose limpid and precise prose had fascinated him -- he slipped the *Candide* surreptitiously under his coat.

Unfortunately, the pimple-face clerk was watching him.

As Gregory walked, with beating heart and feigned casualness, to the door, the clerk caught him by the shoulder.

"Hey, there --"

Gregory stopped. "What do you want --"

"What you got there --?"

Gregory trembled with nervousness. "Nothing. I haven't anything there." He was numb with terror. If he could only reach the door and run --

But the clerk clutched him roughly and shook him. *Candide* fell to the floor, delicate leaves downward. Gregory stooped to recover it, but the clerk held him tight. A thick scarlet suffused the boy's terrified features.

Unceremoniously, the clerk dragged him through the aisle to the

back of the store, where Frans Miller was hunched over a pile of dusty tomes, peering at the fine print over his steel-rimmed spectacles.

"Caught the kid stealing a book, Mister Miller. Had my eye on him for some time --"

Frans Miller looked at the clerk and then directed his glance to Gregory. Gregory winced under the keen eyes that focused their direct blue gaze upon him. He felt stripped naked. He felt that he could hide nothing - those eyes saw everything.

"Yah?" Frans Miller's voice was deep and resonant. It reminded Gregory of the alto of the waves of Lake Michigan on stormy autumn nights. It implied the same power -- controlled, but nevertheless hinting at great strength and fury that could be unleashed at will.

"Stole a book --" Frans Miller repeated. He looked at the boy with interest.

"Why did you steel a book?" Frans Miller asked Gregory.

"I didn't have enough money to buy it --"

"And you coveted it so eagerly?"

"Yes! Yes! I have wanted it for days. I have been thinking of it since the first time I saw it here, and trying to get enough money to buy it -- But I only have seventy-five cents saved up and I couldn't wait any longer -- I want to read that book -- I want to own it -- I couldn't wait --" In his eagerness to speak of the volume, Gregory had forgotten his fear.

"What is the book?" Frans Miller asked his clerk.

"Voltaire's *Candide*!"

The old man looked at the boy in surprise. "What made you want the book so badly?"

"I don't know, sir. I didn't read much of it, only a bit here and there, but it sort of got me, and made me want to read the rest. And when I got home, I kept thinking about it more and more. There's something --" He ceased as if ashamed to show his inner feelings to an outsider, but the look on the old man's face urged him to continue. "There's something big about it -- it leaves you wondering -- makes you think about it, and you want to read it again, to see if you got it right -- and --" He floundered and

glanced at the bookseller.

"You know what happens to boys that steal? . . ."

Gregory was silent. He knew what happened to boys that stole. He wondered what his father would say when he learned his son was a thief. He would probably be more eager to denounce him than the police. And his mother would say nothing, but in her heart she would cry. . . Gee, poor Ma! And the Reformatory -- He had heard about it. They made you wear gray uniforms and beat you and treated you like prisoners -- And no books! His face grew pallid. If they sent him to the Reformatory, he would have to get along without books. And what would happen to his collection in the little shelves under the rafters? . . . Would Sophie or Teresa burn them? No, no --

"You don't appear worried --"

"Yes, sir, I am, but I guess it's up to you."

"Hummm." A pause. Gregory bit his lips to keep from screaming. He would take his medicine like a sport. "Well," continued Frans Miller, "Suppose we let you keep the book. You can pay for it each week, as much as you have --"

Gregory tried to speak, but his throat was clogged with a sob. He walked out without saying a word. His eyes, fiercely cobalt blue, had thanked Frans Miller.

Through this incident, a warm friendship sprang up between the old bookseller of sixty-five and the young booklover of sixteen. Gregory commenced to spend every spare minute at the bookshop, delving through its rich and abundant hordes, often spending a fascinating hour in conversation with Frans Miller.

It was here that he first heard the names of Darwin, Huxley, Ingersoll, Swedenborg, Marx, Ibsen and others, who were to confuse and torment his soul in the following years. It was Frans Miller who introduced him to the poetry of Walt Whitman. And in time, Gregory treasured his copy of *Leaves of Grass* above all other volumes of verse in his tiny but select collection.

With less unease and agony than his brothers, Gregory waded through the period of adolescence. Although, undoubtedly, for a number of months his reading was largely restricted to the shelves of erotica in Frans Miller's bookshop. And the *Decameron* of

Boccaccio, in an excellent old calf binding, with the Dore illustratons, reposed on the top shelf near his bed, where he could reach it easily during the fiful, restless hours when sleep would not come, and voluptuous fancies tormented his weary brain. . .

Every evening, he read until late, often until two or three in the morning. He was never without a book. His life centered entirely in the world of books. Nothing else -- except in his lonely walks, his very vivid appreciation of the rich beauty of nature -- seemed real to him. When his father berated him for coming to the store late in the morning, he accepted the scoldings and abuse with a dazed calm that bewildered Israel Challanty, and made him wonder if this handsome, lanky son of his was quite sane.

II

"Mr. Challanty, your son, Gregory, has been failing in his studies this term. I can't understand the reason, for he appears to have a good mind." Miss Simpson, assistant principal of the Muskenaw High School, was speaking to Israel. She was a tall, big-boned woman, whose jolly appearance was belied by her dark, bitter eyes, precisely the color of dried prunes.

"I don't think he pays enough attention to home work -- although, somehow, he always manages an answer to the instructor's questions. But he falls down on examinations --"

Having Israel Challanty's promise to look into the matter, she walked out of the store into the hot street.

Israel's cries and curses made little impression upon Gregory. However, when the old man threatened,

"I'll burn your books, you hear! Sophie told me, she sees your light burning at night! Wasting gas for nothing! And tiring yourself out so you can't get up in the morning and work in the store. And now your teachers complain. I'll show you, you loafer! I'll burn your books! I'll teach you to obey me!"

Again his words crushed Gregory. He promised. "All right, Pa, I'll do anything you say. I'll get up early and come to the store. I'll

do my home work. Only don't touch my books. Leave them alone -- please, Pa --''

And again, he was filled with the old longing to run away. Anywhere, just to be far from his home and the store and the old man. But he lacked the courage for the final step. Where could he go? What could he do? And they might arrest him and bring him back . . . and perhaps put him in the Reform School in Lansing. . . Oh, if only he could be free of them all. . .

XVI

BONDAGE

I

Gregory had known Rita most of his life.

They attended school together, from their kindergarten days to the senior year of high school. She was a tiny little mouse, quiet and unobtrusive, with slate gray eyes and soft brown hair. Without being exactly conscious of it, Gregory always liked being near her. She gave him a feeling of repose. He watched her in class sometimes and marveled at her stillness. She could sit through a whole lecture without stirring or turning restlessly in her seat or fidgeting about as the others did. She was like a Buddha, he thought, like one of the graven images that cluttered a corner of Frans Miller's bookshop. It seemed to him that she emanated serenity and calm. He did not realize that her placidity was of an uncomprehending, bovine nature.

During his high school days, he met her hardly at all, their classes separating them, for Rita was taking a commercial course and he a classical. And as Gregory never made an appearance at a social function or athletic event, he saw her only when they met in the corridors of the school. And always he was struck with the air of placidity that enveloped her. She seemed apart from the others, the raucous, screaming girls that shrieked and danced through the halls. He thought her remote from the crowds -- like himself.

Once he met her in the dark, cool recesses of the Stackley Public Library. She was walking to the librarian's desk with several volumes under her arm, when he intercepted her.

"What are you reading?" he asked. Gregory could never resist the impulse to look over the books that others liked.

"Oh, a new book by Ethel M. Dell. She's awfully good! And Harold Bell Wright's *Shepherd of the Hills*. I saw the movie last night, so I thought I'd read the book. It was simply great!" Gregory liked her voice. It was low and rather soft. "What are *you* reading?" she inquired in turn.

"A book of McFee's. He's fine. I like him better than Conrad. And some verses by an English poet, Rupert Brooke."

"I never heard of them."

He walked out of the library with her and offered to take her home, but she refused, saying that she was to meet a girl friend and go to the latter's home for supper.

Except for a brief meeting at commencement, Gregory did not see her again for over two years. He was almost twenty, a tall, striking lad, handsome, except for the puzzled look in his blue eyes and the scowl that contorted his dark brow. He spent most of his days in the store, where he was completely useful, absorbing himself in work, to shut out the distasteful pictures of the old man and the brothers. His evenings were devoted to books and visits to Frans Miller.

Then one Saturday afternoon, as he was hurrying home for a bite of food before the afternoon rush of customers, he met her again. He stopped in surprise. How she had changed in the last two years! She seemed clothed in raiments of maturity. There was a look of suffering on her face. Yet, at the same time, she was still the gentle and serene creature that he had always pictured her to be.

"How have you been?" he asked.

She told him quietly that her mother had been killed recently in an automobile accident and that she had given up her position as stenographer at Hardy's to keep house for her father, who was a foreman at the National Motor Works. As she spoke her eyes filled with tears, and Gregory clasped her thin, bony hands in sympathy. He forgot that he was in a hurry to eat and return home. "May I walk home with you?" he asked, and was happy when she acquiesced.

Leaving her at the door, he made arrangements to see her again.

He met her again, and then again. They commenced seeing each other twice and three times a week. Gregory thought that he found in her a fascinating companion. She was a good listener. He talked to her almost as intimately as to Frans Miller. Sometimes they sat in Stackley Park or on the dunes of Lake Michigan and Gregory read from his favorite poets to her. He bought her books to read.

However, try as he might, he could not convert her taste in literature. To her, Ethel M. Dell and Berta Ruck and Zane Grey were the greatest writers. When he gave her Dreiser or Anderson or Willa Cather to read, she returned them unfinished. "I just can't get interested in them, Greg," she protested. However, Gregory blinded himself to her liking "for a nice clean love story that made you feel good." He believed that inherently she possessed good literary tastes and that eventually he would awaken them and teach her to appreciate real literature.

Talking to Rita and taking long walks with her and going to the movies could not go on, Gregory found, without a thought of sex creeping in, and within a short time, becoming of paramount importance. It was Rita who brought the matter to a climax.

They were sitting in her living room, locked in a tight embrace.

"Gregory dearest, we oughtn't to be doing this --"

Gregory was silent. He knew that it was the logical moment for him to protest to her, that she expected it of him, but he could not bring himself to speak. He didn't want to marry. The thought of marriage, even with Rita, filled him with terror. From his books and the teachings of Frans Miller, he was imbued with a revulsion against the necessity of man-made marital laws. He saw marriage only as a public announcement of loving a woman sufficiently to pay a great price for the privilege of sleeping with her.

He decided that it was wisest to make his stand known. "I don't believe in marriage," he said.

She did not answer. She looked at him blankly. Never had the discussion of marriage entered into their conversations. Rita had the conventional modesty that prevented her from discussing marriage until her man had honorably proposed.

"But we can't go on this way," she protested.

"No, you're right."

"But what shall we do?" She was insistent.

"That is up to you, Rita."

She said in amazement, "You aren't leaving me, Greg?"

His heart ached, but he was resolute. He could not sacrifice his beliefs. That way they would never be happy. "If you feel that marriage is the only way out, Rita, I'm afraid I'll have to."

"You don't love me!" she accused.

"You know that's not true, Rita."

"Then why don't you want to marry me?"

"I don't believe in marriage."

"Don't believe in marriage!" she echoed. "But everybody marries!"

"Yes," he agreed, "they do."

"But how can you have babies if you aren't married?"

"You don't have babies."

"You're very selfish, Gregory." She spoke solemnly as if she had just discovered that trait. "You're the most selfish man I've ever known."

They parted with the understanding that they were not to see each other again. Rita cried and implored, but Gregory was adamant. "I'd be unhappy and I'd make you unhappy."

"Then I never want to see you again --"

"That's up to you --"

The ensuing days were filled with agony for Gregory. He felt that Rita had become essential to him, and he realized that he wanted her badly. "If only I had an absorbing work," he said to himself. "Anything sufficiently engrossing to forget her --"

But during the long day, as he clerked in the store, visions of her pale face with the slate colored eyes stirred mistily before him, and at night they troubled his dreams. Only when he was reading could he banish the thoughts of Rita from his mind. Books, always an obsession with him, now became almost a madness. Anything to forget her. . .

For three months he did not see her. Then, finally, when he thought the wound was beginning to heal and the hurt and longing

fading, he met her again and discovered that his affection for her was too deep-rooted to have withered away entirely.

It happened on Labor Day. Gregory had gone out to Lake Michigan to watch the crowds. He went alone, for he did not like mingling with people, as he would be compelled to if he took a feminine companion. He considered himself the looker-on in life. . .

She was walking along the boardwalk of the Casino with two other girls. She stopped short when she saw him.

His blood pounding madly at his temples, Gregory approached her. He tried to greet her casually.

"Oh, hello --"

She answered him in the same vein. "Hello! What are you doing by your lonesome?"

"Just looking around."

"Have you tried the new Ferris wheel?"

"No, have you?"

"No --"

"Would you like to go on it?"

"Crazee to!" She excused herself from her feminine companions and walked away with Gregory. The light touch of her hand resting on his arm excited him.

"How have you been?"

"All right! And how are you?" She looked at him from the corner of her eye.

He did not answer. They reached the Ferris wheel and climbed into a seat. Rita was as happy as a child. She appeared to have forgotten their last bitter talk, or perhaps she chose to disregard it.

They had supper at the Casino, dancing twice during the meal, and then strolled out to the dunes. Already the sun had set, and the sky vaulted clear above the soft, rippling waters. A few couples had straggled to the sands and were sitting and lying in amorous positions. Gregory swept his arm around her shoulders, his hand close to her breast. She did not resist. With a choked sob, she raised her pale face to his.

Thereafter they met regularly, almost every evening. Some-

times Gregory had supper with Rita and her father, a small, wizened man with faded blue eyes and a heavy, red-veined nose. Gregory hated facing him, knowing that he would condemn Greg thoroughly as his daughter's seducer, if he knew of their intimate relationship. . . After eating, he helped Rita dry the dishes and then they went out to a movie or for a walk. Although, as the weeks sped on, the walks decreased. Rita was not strong, she said, and walking for three or four miles at a stretch tired her out.

"Let's sit in the parlor and listen to the Victrola," she suggested. "It's too cool to go out." And Gregory thought of his long, lonely walks in the autumnal moonlight when the crisp air danced through his body and set his blood on fire. Nights for hikes and cider and ripe red apples. . . He tried to forget that he missed them. He tried to think only of Rita with her slate-colored eyes and generous body.

Gregory was infinitely relieved that his family did not learn of his relations with Rita. Or, at least, if they were aware of it, they made no effort to interfere. He recalled the racket the old man made about Leon's marriage to Lotta. But he had cooled down quickly, and just recently, when the kid, Barnett, got tangled up with the handsome young Amazon who bore him a child three weeks after marriage, Israel made hardly any fuss at all. But Gregory had seen his mother's eyes. . .

Well, at least, he wasn't bringing home a Gentile daughter-in-law, so they had nothing to trouble themselves over, and there was no danger of a scandal. Gregory smiled to himself. He knew that the old man would resent a scandal only so far as it affected business. . .

Only Leon warned him, once: "Don't get tangled up with any woman, Greg, no matter how decent you think she is," and although Gregory had scowled, his heart was shaken with compassion. Lotta was certainly leading Leon a hectic life!

For four years he continued thus, working at the store all day and seeing Rita practically every night. During this time he had come to the realization that it is not legal ties that make marriage so binding. For even without them, he was completely bound to Rita. He could not break away if he wanted to, and he knew that he

was too weak to try, for he dreaded hurting her. She resented Frans Miller, was jealous of the evenings Gregory spent with him.

The truth was that Gregory dreaded facing Frans Miller these days. There was a look of compassion in the old man's eyes that Gregory feared. "I don't want pity," he burst out, one evening. "Don't pity me, Frans, I hate it!"

"It is not pity, my boy," the old booklover answered. "With you, I am reliving the experiences of my own youth. Only I had the courage to break away -- even at the cost of those superficial things which most people value highly -- But I do not regret that. And I am reconciled to America."

After that, although Gregory felt better, the bitterness in his heart remained. He knew that he would never have the courage to break away. . .

Then, Rita decided that she wanted a child.

"What for?" Gregory demanded. "It will only complicate things."

"You're terribly selfish, Greg. Haven't you ever wanted a child?"

"No, I can't imagine myself as a father. It's incongruous."

"Well, I want a baby. I'm crazy for one, dear. A little son of my own." Her eyes were burning with a feverish light. "Greg, I must have a child!"

"Well, if you feel that way about it, I can't stop you. Go ahead and have it." With a gesture of irritation Gregory stifled his cigarette. The conversation was beginning to pall on him. He made a mental note of precaution; Rita wouldn't have a baby if he could help it.

But she was insistent. "I can't have a child when we're this way, Greg. Why, it would be a --" she could not bring herself to utter the word. She arose and put her arms around Gregory's neck. "Please, darling," she murmured.

She was prepared for an evening of lengthy cajoling and pleading. His immediate acquiescence amazed her. "All right, Rita. We'll get married if you wish it."

She smiled. Looking at her face, Gregory thought of an alley cat,

whose belly was full of unexpected cream, licking its chops contentedly.

II

Gregory made no effort to sell his customer, and when the latter walked out with a disgruntled air, he put the garments back on the rack casually, and walked toward Kopel.

"Have they heard anything from Leon yet?"

"No!" Kopel was more concerned about Leon than Gregory, but he believed it bad taste to show his emotions.

"Did you call the hospital again?"

"Yes, Lotta is conscious now. Her neck is badly wrenched, but nothing serious. More fright than anything else, I guess."

Gregory wondered what had happened at Leon's home last evening. Lotta unconscious, her neck horribly bruised, found by the maid in the morning. Leon gone. A tremor shook Gregory. Always, he had felt a vague premonition that a tragedy of some kind would finally break the tie that bound Leon to Lotta. Underneath Leon's superficial placidity, Gregory had sensed a high tension, a tautness of nerves that would rupture, bringing a catastrophe in its wake. He wondered where Leon was now. If there were any way to get in touch with him.

Of course, Kopel worried about the scandal that the unhappy incident might cause, but Gregory never gave that end of it a thought. Suddenly, he sympathized very compassionately with Leon, for he saw that his own life was hardly different. He, too, was chained. True that Rita was not promiscuous -- undoubtedly she was faithful to him -- but her very faithfulness tied him down, choked him. . . And for him there was no way out. . .

Aside from the worry about Leon, Gregory was harrowed by other troubles.

Muskenaw, in taking the War seriously, was riding on a tidal wave of patriotism that was drowning every alien who stood in its course. With a fervor that the patriotic cinemas might envy, the town was rooting out every man who had the aspects of an enemy spy. Major among these was Frans Miller.

Muskenaw had never liked Frans Miller. He was queer. And there was something funny, too, about his bookshop. In the first place, imagine anyone trying to make a living by selling second-hand books! Muskegon guffawed. And in the second place, he didn't even try to sell his books! Very often, he refused a potential customer, saying that the book desired was not for sale. And everybody knew that he was a German! Of course, the bookshop was merely a disguise. A Hun spy in their midst!

The police investigated and found nothing that would give them the technical excuse for an arrest. However, the fervid suspicion of the patriotic citizens continued unabated. Old Miller might be too clever for the police, but he couldn't put anything over on them!

And soon Frans Miller found that although he was reconciled to Muskenaw, Muskenaw was not reconciled to him. His clerk, the pimple-faced, sandy-haired youth who had been with him for five years, left suddenly, making a shamefaced excuse about finding work at the National Motor Works, where exorbitant wages were being paid. Frans Miller found that the grocery with which he had been trading for years was now reluctant to take his orders and delinquent in delivering them. Morning after morning, he washed off the ugly names that the children, and perhaps their elders, had chalked on his windows during the night.

In open defiance, Gregory spent every spare minute with Frans Miller. Kopel argued, the old man scolded -- "You'll spoil business, bumming around with that old German, you hear!" -- but to no avail. He arose earlier and helped Frans with the odd chores around the bookshop. He shopped for him. He even offered to sleep with him, but this Frans would not allow. "You are sacrificing too much already, my friend."

To-night, Gregory was tense with anxiety. He felt that there was mischief brewing; he smelled it in the air. The old sots and rowdies who hung about Dago Mike's and the respectable, law-abiding citizens of Muskenaw were united in this impetuous impulse to rid the town of all undesirables.

Restlessly, Gregory paced his room. He did not lie down, feeling sleep impossible. Even his books brought him no surcease. Worn and nervous he opened the door and walked downstairs. At his

mother's room, he stopped a moment. Stifled sobs. As if she were choking them in her pillow. He gritted his teeth and continued his way. Of course, he was sorry about Leon, but the plight of Frans Miller touched him infinitely more.

On the porch, he slouched into a wicker chair and lighted one cigarette after another. By the time he had finished his tenth, he saw Danny approaching. It was late, much past midnight, and as he watched Danny's short stocky figure, he recalled with a sudden vividness, his last visit to the brown house --

"Still up?"

"Yes. Too hot upstairs to sleep."

Danny hesitated for a moment, then he walked closer to Gregory and spoke. "I don't know whether I ought to tell you, Greg, but there's going to be a bit of trouble about old Miller to-night. Maybe you could phone him to get --"

Gregory sprang up. He grasped Danny by the shoulders. "Where did you hear this?"

"Down at Dago Mike's. Some fellows were talking about having a little fun to-night --"

Gregory rushed indoors to the telephone. He gave the operator Frans Miller's number.

"Sorry, they do not answer --"

"Try again, operator, this is an emergency --"

"They do not answer --"

"Give me the chief operator, please --"

Still no response. They told him, "The telephone appears to be out of order --"

Without stopping for a hat, Gregory ran out of the house and down the street, into Muskenaw Avenue and through Stackley Park, which was deserted, to upper Western Avenue.

The small ramshackle building that housed the bookshop was dark and apparently quiet. Gregory breathed a sigh of relief. He knocked cautiously on the back door. No answer.

"Frans, don't be afraid. Open, it's Greg --"

And still no answer. Gregory peered into the window, but all objects within were enveloped in darkness. Again he knocked on the door and tried the knob. To his surprise it gave way and he

almost fell into the room. He lit a match and called softly, "Frans! Where are you, Frans?"

Receiving no response, he lit the gas. Horrible confusion met his eyes. The bed was empty, the blankets on the floor, the pillows missing. Books, many of them Frans Miller's rarest volumes, were strewn around the floor; and the bookshelves were in chaotic disorder. Frans Miller's dark felt hat was hanging on a peg on the door and his shabby clothes were crumbled up on a Morris chair. The room was silent with a foglike silence. Gregory shuddered. He was certain that the worst had happened.

He stumbled out of the bookshop and into the street. He was in a daze. Where had they taken Frans Miller? Where could he find his old friend? And in what condition would he find him?

Standing in the shadow of the store, he saw two men approach. They peered into the windows of the bookshop. One muttered to the other,

"They've taken him away already. Well, let's go down there --"

Gregory sauntered up to them. "Going down to see the fun?" Casually.

"Yep. Comin' along?"

"Sure thing. Wouldn't miss it."

They walked across the street to the dock, and from there to the water front. Gregory trembled with fear, not for himself, but for Frans Miller. He knew where they were going. To the isolated strip of land that bordered the swampy stretch of Muskenaw Lake. And there --

Nearing the secluded swamp land, they saw a large bonfire which was burning -- casting faint, ruddy reflections into the dark waters. Gregory ran a few steps closer, then stopped, paralyzed with horror.

Never would he forget the picture he saw at that moment. Visions of it were to torment his days and make his nights nightmares of the Inquisition.

The flames of the bonfire wove weird patterns of light over the dark figures that crowded about it. The air was charged with an undercurrent of sullen defiance and false bravado. Gregory pushed his way into the mob.

Then he saw Frans Miller. With a choked cry he flung his hands before his face to blot out the horrible picture.

The old man was nude, and his skin showed ghastly white in the places where he was not scorched with the black tar. His hair and beard were clotted with tar and blood. Yet his face -- eyes partly closed -- expressed no fear, was almost immobile --

With a cry of protest, Gregory dashed toward him -- "Frans!" -- "Frans!" -- but he was caught and held back by rough hands.

"Friend of the Hun, eh? Well, yuh better stand back, unless y'd like a coat, too!"

They lifted some puffy white bundles from the ground. Gregory recognized them as the pillows taken from Frans' bed. He strained at the hands that leashed him. Not the feathers! No -- No --

He tried to close his eyes but the muscles were paralyzed with horror, and refused to function. Slowly, the cloud of feathers descended upon Frans' blackened body. Enveloped him. Gregory stifled an impulse to laugh hysterically. It was all so unreal, so fantastic! They couldn't be doing this to Frans, good old Frans -- No! No!

A moan from Frans' tightened lips aroused him.

He broke loose of the clutching hands. He tore into the crowd. "Damn you all --" he shrieked. "Damn you with your crazed patriotism --" Again rough hands caught him. He stumbled and fell. A heavy boot bruised his temple. He attempted to rise, but innumerable feet were treading on his body. He caught at a leg and pulled it down. Fists rained blows upon him. He was powerless to retaliate. "Damn you, damn you all --" he sobbed. His eyes were blinded by a stream of blood from the cuts on his head. "Frans!" he screamed, "Where are you, Frans?"

A gruff, whisky voice, "Get outa here, you lousy sheeny, or we'll give you a ride with your Hun friend --"

He stumbled away. Where was Frans? What were they doing to him now? He groped his way to the dock, slowly, haltingly, dragging his right leg, which was crumpling helplessly under him. At the dock, he found a cab and drove home. He crawled up the stairs in the cold, clammy dawn, and reached his room. There he collapsed.

An hour later he was aroused from his lethargy by the sharp clang of fire engines. He closed his eyes in great pain, for he knew that Frans Miller's bookshop was burning.

XVII

DANSE MACABRE

I

The large, maple-veneered desk, which blocked the major part of the tiny cubicle in the rear of the store, was badly littered. Slouching before it, and searching for a recent bill of lading among the innumerable scribbled and typed sheets, Israel Challanty reflected with growing irritation that his desk served mainly as a storehouse for trash. Here, tucked away in a corner, he found some of Miriam's letters to Kopel, when he was in Chicago on his last business trip; three bills of the Style Shop to Mrs. Leon Challanty, marked "paid"; several baseball clippings from the Muskenaw *Chronicle*; old copies of *Motion Picture Magazine* and *Love Stories*; and a list of stock quotations. At the sight of the last-named, a smile spread over Israel's ponderous red features. National Motors had been going up all week -- five points yesterday -- four this morning -- and the day was still young! Fine stock, National! And he had foreseen its rise. He had possessed the wisdom and the acumen to invest heavily -- That had been real foresight!

But business in the store had fallen off considerably this last month. Something was wrong here -- the early autumn months should have been very busy. And certainly, with the fine job lots he had been picking up in Chicago, the store should have increased the volume of its business. Well, he'd fix that up.

With an awkward effort, he moved his thick body, and without arising from the office chair, pulled the door open and called, "Gregory! I want you. Come here, Gregory!"

Quietly, Gregory entered and remained standing near the door. His face was pale and his blue eyes were daubed with black rings. A vivid red scar, memento of a night of horror, burned lividly on his countenance, white beneath its coat of tan. He did not sit down. "Yes?"

"I think we will make a sale. Business has been rotten this month. A big sale. I'm gettin' some things in from Mandelbaum in Chicago. A job lot. It oughta go big."

"All right."

"Get busy with the advertising and the signs. And tell Barnett to come in. I wanta talk to him. He's loafing too much. What the hell does he think he's drawing money for?"

Without replying, Gregory left the room. For a brief second a smile curled the sullen corners of his mouth. He knew where Barnett was, all right. In his small apartment, minding the squawking kid that his blond young Amazon had borne him three weeks after marriage. Perhaps Danny was there, too. Danny was crazy about children. He could care for them better than a woman. Gregory recalled the occasion when Kopel's youngest boy had been taken sick one evening, when Greg and Danny were present. The way Danny had picked the child up and succored him -- with the gentleness of a woman or a doctor. . .

Danny should have been a doctor. Invariably, when a fellow got hurt playing, Danny would fix him up. He would fuss around with bandages and liniment, all the kids watching him enviously.

As they grew older, Gregory once suggested, "You ought to study medicine, Danny. You'd make a good doctor."

"Yeh --" Danny answered derisively. "The old man'll let me, won't he? Put me through college, huh?" He spat. "Like hell he will! Wouldn't even let me finish high school --"

Too bad, Gregory reflected, that Danny's life should be spoiled. Because of old Israel's selfishness. But, then, hadn't he spoiled all their lives with his lust for money, money, money -- Look at them: Leon the only one possessing any education. (How he had been compelled to fight for it -- working his way through college by waiting on tables and stoking furnaces) -- And the others, Kopel, Danny, Barnett, and the girls, with no education to speak of -- no

knowledge of books or anything. Only absorbed in making money -- like the old man -- and dressing well, and running around for a "good time." Bah, Gregory detested them and their mode of living.

His line of reflection was ruptured by the entrance of a short, blond, overdressed woman. He turned away for he felt no desire to speak to her. But Lotta had already seen him.

"Where's the old man, Greg?"

"In the office."

"Anybody with him?"

"I don't know --"

Without knocking, she entered the office. "Hello, Father Challanty," she greeted him. Israel winced. He did not relish being called "father" by this woman.

"Hello!" Curtly. He wondered what she wanted. Money, of course. Well, she'd wait --

For a moment she stood uncertainly, then she smiled gayly, "Guess I'll sit down."

Challanty grunted acquiescence.

She came directly to the point. "I need some money, Father Challanty. In these last four months I have used up all I had --"

"Yeh?"

"As Leon's father I am sure you will take care of me --"

"Yeh?"

She squirmed. "You will, won't you, Father? Lookit the way Leon left me --"

"You deserved it --"

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I said. He should have done it long ago --"

Fury reddened her face. "How dare you!" She threatened him with scandal. "Suppose it got in the papers that Leon tried to kill me --"

"Well --"

"And the scandal -- It would ruin all of you, all the Challantys --"

He chuckled. "It might be good for business, though. People

would come to the store to buy, just for a look at the famous Challantys --'' He became sober and leaned forward, pointing a pudgy finger at her. ''But, suppose the papers find out about Bob, the foreman at the Alison, and about Casey, and Burt, and the officer -- How about the scandal and your *reputation*? --''

Her face was scarlet but she said nothing. He continued, ''Don't think, Lotta, that because I haven't said anything I don't know what's been going on. Israel knows everything, don't worry! Now listen, Leon left you a fine house, a car, and plenty of jewelry and some money in the bank. You have enough to take care of yourself until he comes back -- if he ever does --''

''Oh, he'll come back,'' she remarked, but her smile denoted uncertainty. ''He can't get along without me --''

''Yeh? Well, we'll see -- Meanwhile, you can get along damn well on what he left you.''

Recognizing defeat, she arose, and without another word, left.

At the desk, Israel turned back to his papers with a sign of relief. He had been expecting Lotta; he divined that she would attempt to blackmail him into giving her money. Well, he had called her bluff; he had shown her that it was hard to fool old Israel Challanty.

These suits and coats he had purchased from Mandelbaum ought to sell well. They looked nice and were precisely the kind that the men from the Works admired. He should clean up fifteen hundred to two thousand on that sale. . .

Waddling out of the store, he stood on Western Avenue and gazed about him. God, how the town had grown! He recalled his first glimpse of it that cold autumnal morning, when he had stumbled in, hungry and footsore, to find a bed and a bite to eat. And now the same street: tall brick buildings, shoulder to shoulder, crowding each other; stores and offices; sidewalks overflowing with shoppers; streets noisy and congested with traffic.

He rubbed his moist palms together in enormous satisfaction. He had come up in the world! With the town, he had grown in wealth and power. Quite a difference from the little fellow who had driven the team of horses for old Leibe, to the figure of Israel Challanty, richest Jew in Muskenaw! He had shown them, all

right! He had accumulated many, many of the round yellow coins that proved the open sesame to the world. Power! Ah, money is power -- yes, indeed!

Although it was only four months since Leon's disappearance, his father, Israel Challanty, had completely forgotten about him.

"Power --" he was murmuring to himself. "Money is power -- yessir --"

II

Three weeks after the Armistice, David Block, Sophie's husband, returned to Muskenaw.

He walked into the Block Shoe Store, early one morning, as Sophie was directing the window trimmer, and announced quietly, "I have come back."

For a second Sophie did not recognize him. He had changed so! So thin -- with a yellowish pallor overcasting his skin. He trembled when he shook hands with Sophie and his voice was strained with weariness.

And suddenly, Sophie realized she was glad that David was back. She had missed him. Despite her material success, she had suffered by the knowledge that fingers were pointed at her as the Challanty girl whose husband had deserted her. Now that he had returned -- of his free will -- she could laugh in their faces.

Immediately after America's entrance in the World War, David had enlisted. He had served in France in the thick of the fighting. He had been wounded twice and shellshocked. Now, he had returned home, prematurely aged and crippled. Upon reaching Chicago, he discovered that his brother had been forced into bankruptcy, and David, without a cent in his pocket, had nothing to do.

"Why don't you go back to Muskenaw," his brother suggested. "You have a wife and children there. And a business --"

"How can I go back after the way I deserted them? It wouldn't be decent --"

"Don't be a fool. She'll welcome you back, I'm sure of it."

"Well --" David vacillated. Yes, it would be good to return to his wife and children -- they must have grown some, the youngsters! -- to a home of his own and a business. He was so tired. . . "Well --"

"Take my advice, Dave, go back -- At least, try it --"

So David had returned to Muskenaw, and his wife offered him a restrained though hearty welcome. It was convenient, having David back. Aside from vindicating her in the eyes of the town, she felt the need of him. After all, a woman is no different from a man.

She took him to her new home, a fine red brick Colonial house which she had built for herself and the children, and nourished him with a warm breakfast, while she sat across the table and gossiped about Muskenaw. She tried to be gentle, for she did not wish him to leave again.

Later, when they were walking to her parents' home she told him about Leon. "We haven't seen or heard from him since that morning -- The conductor saw Leon on the train to Grand Rapids -- from there on, we could find no trace of him --"

"Queer," he answered, "I thought I saw him once, over there. I could swear it was he. Some of the men were being decorated, and the ceremony took place near our hospital. They wheeled us out on chairs and let us watch. One of the fellows who got the Croix de Guerre was Leon. I could swear it --"

"Oh, no! --" incredulously.

"Yes, it was Leon, all right! Only there was something different about him. Sort of a recklessness -- but it was Leon --"

"Didn't you get a chance to talk to him --?"

"No --"

"Or see him again?"

"No -- I looked up the list of the men who were decorated and the name Challanty was not among them. Later, I asked some fellows, but nobody heard of Leon Challanty --"

"Maybe, he'll come back . . ."

Walking in silence, they turned up Muskenaw Avenue. As they passed the old Rabenstein home, David thought of Elizabeth. . . Apparently divining his thoughts, Sophie remarked casually,

"You remember Elizabeth Rabenstein? Well, she separated

from her husband. Yes, living with her children with the old folks. There was quite a scandal. He wasn't much good, her husband --''

''How the town has grown!''

''Yes, business is fine. Everybody's making money. Better than in some bigger cities --''

Yes, the war had agreed with Muskenaw.

III

Months of agony. No surcease. Lying in Rita's arms, his flesh finding comfort and relief in her nearness, his mind visualized pictures of Frans Miller's tarred and feathered and mutilated body floating on the dirty waters of Muskenaw Lake, among the weeds near the swamp land. Even his books brought him no relief. On every printed page, he saw a picture of the old bookseller looking straight through him, over his steel-rimmed spectacles. . . The deserted bedroom . . . the bookshop in chaos . . . the horribly disfigured body. . . Frans, where are you? What have they done to you? . . .

Every second of the day ticked a pendulum of steel through his body. His flesh had gone numb through the crucifixion of his soul. He could not eat or sleep. The days dragged by slowly, like a hearse of exhausted horses. . .

When Rita told him she was going to have a baby, he was overwhelmed with horror. Bring a helpless being into this crazed, maddened world! To suffer as he had suffered, to undergo his uncertainty and pain -- What a fool she was, Rita, oh, what a fool!

Only those evenings that he spent by himself, on Lake Michigan, alleviated his pain to a slight degree. Now that autumn had come, the crowds had fled and the Lake was entirely deserted. Clad in old flannels and a warm sweater, book in hand, Gregory rented a canoe and spent many nights paddling through the clear, blue-green waters. In the vast and lusty richness of nature, his own troubles shrank to tiny insignificance. They were lost, like specks of dust whirling in the air, in the bigness of the large, lonely lake mounted with pine-crested dunes. . .

On the morning that Armistice was declared, the store closed at

one o'clock and Gregory had the afternoon for himself. It was a cold, cheerless day, the skies heavy with leaden clouds. The streets were alive, bursting with clamorous, excited throngs. Whistles prolonged their shrieks, horns of motor cars joined the din, and above all, the loud, hoarse, hectically gay voices of the multitudes. The war was over. The boys would be coming home. The Huns were beat. The world made safe for Democracy. We showed them! Hurrah!

The rest of the Challantys hurried home to lunch, Kopel to Miriam, the old man and the boys to the big yellow house -- but Gregory did not join them. Instead, he snatched a sandwich and a cup of hot coffee at a cafeteria and rode out to the Lake. He wanted to be alone -- away from the raving crowds that jammed the streets and theaters. Alone on the Lake in his canoe.

He had never seen the Lake in such somber beauty, he thought, paddling far out, as if trying to reach the horizon. The sky, bloated to a leaden gray, was tinged with subdued yellow and faint, translucent lavender that reflected themselves in the icy waters. The dunes had faded into a pale lemon, fringed with dark pines that looked from the distance like toy Christmas trees. The waves were turbulent and Gregory thought they melted into each other with the subtle beauty of a cat's tread.

Three quarters of a mile out, he ceased paddling and lay flat in the bottom of his canoe, his arms propped behind his head. A sharp, icy wind pricked his skin through the thick sweater, but he paid no attention to it. He had discovered long ago, that by breathing deeply and disregarding the cold, he could to a great extent conquer it. It gave him infinite satisfaction to prove himself above a physical weakness.

But the wind was increasing in strength and velocity, and the canoe began to rock dangerously. "I should turn back," he thought, and yet could not summon the impulse to sit up and paddle to the shore. "It feels just right, lying here. I belong here --"

Again the canoe swerved. Before he could sit up to right it, a gust of wind overturned it. He plunged into the icy water, which after the first shock, froze him. For a moment he gripped the

overturned canoe, but his fingers grew cold and he was compelled to let go. He struck out for land, but with each stroke forward the shore seemed to recede. Second by second, his body grew more numb, and although his mind forced his arms to move, they ceased to function properly. He felt himself submerging. His lungs ached and he choked. Terrified, clawing for air, he arose to the surface again.

Suddenly, he recalled a book he had once read and admired deeply: *Martin Eden*. He remembered the vivid description of Eden's last moments before he lost consciousness. Am I drowning, Gregory wondered -- am I, too, losing the will to live? -- He struggled to the surface again, but knew that his body was growing weaker. In a minute he would not feel it. I am dying, he thought, and yet I am not afraid --

In a swift flash, like a rapid cinema, his life passed before him: babyland and the paper dolls; books; Ma; the time that Sophie and Teresa destroyed *Moby Dick* and he saved his pennies to pay back the library for the volume; his subsequent visits to the bookshop. Frans Miller. Frans Miller's tortured body floating in the waters -- as his would soon be floating. And Rita -- how had he gotten tangled up with her? Poor Rita, poor Gregory, poor Leon -- And the old man -- the night he had been sick and had dreamed that the old man had come to his room and sung to him -- And then, suddenly, clearly, Gregory knew that it had not been a dream, and he was infinitely consoled. . .

This last sharp pain, for the moment so unbearable. . . But soon, no more pain, nothing will hurt again. Choking -- that horrible sensation he had experienced as a child with the croup -- The pain grew terrific -- After a second it will subside, he thought, and then no more pain --

And quickly, abruptly, in a second, the hurt ceased. Oh, the radiance and the color and the panorama of his life. . . Frans Miller. . . And then, just before darkness came, the vivid realization that through an accident he had discovered the way out -- Self-fulfillment. And no more pain. Comforting, blessed darkness. . .

IV

The tallow candles flickered faintly in the dining room. It was dark, but Bessie had asked them not to turn on the electricity.

Shiva. The week of mourning for the dead. Rabbi Mason had come with a vague murmur of condolence and had rent their garments, and ten Jews, making up a *minyon*, had arrived promptly to say prayers for Gregory's soul. And now --

Bessie sat huddled up in a hard, straight chair, sipping strong black coffee. He was gone, Gregory, never to come back to her, never to come back to her. Outwardly, she shed no tears -- a whole waterfall of tears had drowned her heart -- Gregory, and Leon -- where was Leon? Dead, too? No, no! She knew that he was alive -- you can't fool a mother's heart -- yet David Block had seen him in France months ago and they had received no word from him. Leon -- what a fat, adorable baby he had been -- Given her no trouble at all -- Gregory had been the one who was sickly -- Yet, somehow, she had loved Gregory not better than the others -- but with more solicitude. He had grown away from her, during the last years working at the store and always with his books -- And she, too -- she had had no time for her children -- always working, always working, so that Israel could buy more stock or another house -- Gregory, Gregory, where are you now? Don't you need me, Gregory --

In the synagogue on Pine Street, Israel chanted *Kaddish*, the prayer for the dead, in his soft, rich baritone. His accents died away into a crooning whisper (one night, in the room of a sick lad, lulling him to sleep with a Russian folksong . . . ah, Gregory . .

יתגדל ויתקדש

His voice, poignant with feeling, stirred the hearts of the other Jews. He suffers, they thought, old Israel suffers.

יתגדל ויתכדש

"Amen --"

Kaddish. He was saying *Kaddish* for his son, Gregory. "Generally," he thought, "it is the other way around --"

Rita took Gregory's death less to heart than her father feared. She had loved him -- and being married to one of the Challantys

meant something, of course. But still, he had always been a queer sort. In the last year, she had never been quite at ease with him. She felt that he had shut himself up, like a turtle who withdraws his head into his shell, and that she couldn't reach him, let alone understand him. . . And she would have the baby now, in about three months. That would be a great consolation. And the Jews -- Greg's parents -- would be compelled to provide for her and the child. Wasn't she Greg's widow? Didn't she have a marriage license to prove it? . . .

Book Three

XVIII

CREAM OF THE JEST

I

When Bessie became seriously ill and the doctors ordered her to stay in bed, they moved her downstairs, in the small chamber next to the dining room, so that she could still supervise the household. There she lay, on her enormous mahogany bed, her round face waxen, her eyes dull, weakly issuing commands,

"Mattie, put the roast in the oven for supper." Or,

"-- Goldie, how much did the vegetables cost --?"

The doctors said her heart was affected. Overwork and child-bearing. They put her on a strict diet, and cut out the black coffee that she was so accustomed to drinking. If she were kept quiet and did not excite herself, she might live for years. . .

II

With a sigh of relief, Bessie hears Israel waddle out of the house and bang the door. He had been in an unusually nasty humor for over a week, now, and she began to fear that there would be no let-up. Bessie was accustomed to Israel's temper and sharp tongue. Although never in the course of their marital life had he been affectionate, she had never quite become hardened to it. She took his insults and cruelty with a stoic front, but it hurt sometimes. . .

Of course, National Motors had gone gown considerably and consequently Israel was worried, but it was not that which had brought about this ugly mood -- And then, suddenly, Bessie knew.

His visits to Grand Rapids -- formerly taken once a fortnight, or even once in four weeks -- had increased rapidly in the last two months, so that of late he was absent from home two and three times a week. The cause of it was that terrible widow, Mrs. Bamberg. She should have known it in the first place.

As she lay, weak and helpless on her huge bed, there flashed into Bessie's mind a picture of the scene when Israel first met Mrs. Bamberg of Grand Rapids. He and Bessie had gone up to Petoska for the early autumn -- For Israel, suffering acutely from the devastating effects of hay fever, sought annual relief in the sharp coolness of Petoska, a resort on the upper peninsula of Michigan, which through extensive advertising had acquired a reputation that drew to it a large, sniffling clientele.

Mrs. Bamberg stayed at their hotel. she was short and slightly too plump for the current fashion and her hair shone blond -- ''Bleached --'' the porch gossips sniffed -- and she was painted like a chorine. But the men liked her, especially Israel.

Well, Bessie thought wearily, all of his life Israel had run after women and until he lost all of his virility, she supposed he would continue to do so. From the early days, when immediately after their marriage, Israel had been forced to leave the village so hurriedly because of Stefan's daughter, to these last weeks, when after forty years of marriage, he was still hungry, insatiable for women, she had tolerated his promiscuity without a word of remonstrance. She had choked her emotions in her heart and now they were gushing up with the force of a geyser and threatening to drown her. But she must control them. It was too late for dramatics and scandals. That might have worked twenty years ago, perhaps, but not now. She was a sick old woman. She must go on this way, bearing with fortitude all of the pain and hurt that he had forced upon her. It was too late. . .

She was very weary, Bessie, and her appearance gave truth to her weariness. Her skin was yellowish and furrowed with innumerable minute wrinkles, her false teeth did not fit correctly and when she talked, they slipped about her mouth with a wet aimlessness; her once glossy hair was streaked with saffron gray.

She had worked hard, she reflected, lying quietly tracing the

course of a fly's trail on the window and listening to the clatter of pans in the kitchen. All of her life she had worked hard, from her girlhood, when she cared for her old father and the tiny shack that served as an abode, through the long, interminable years of her marriage: washing, scrubbing, cooking, mending, bearing children. Years of it, years and years of the same routine, without a moment's surcease. Those first days in America, in Muskenaw, when she had taken care of the rooming houses for transient visitors and had washed bedclothes and carried slops. The boarders -- Wops and Hunkies from the Mill and the Works -- for whom she had cooked and washed. Oh, there had been so many of them! So many to cook and wash for! It exhausted her even to think of them. And bearing children. Taking care of nine babies, housework and drudgery interfering with her desire to bring them up properly. Working, always working.

What for? What had she given her life for? To help Israel make more money -- what did he do with his money, anyway? Give his sons an education? Did any of the boys have a real career, like a doctor or lawyer or something? Give his daughters sufficient dowry that they might marry well? What had he done with his money? And what was he doing with his money? Buying stock, buying houses, buying lots, always buying, buying, buying. And the more he owned, the more he wanted! God, how insufferably greedy he was!

What had she received in turn from her husband, she who had given so much? What had her children received? Kopel with barely a public-school education, and the other children with hardly more. Leon had fought for his college training --

Poor Leon -- what a horrible mess his marriage had turned out to be. Born and bred in rigid orthodox beliefs, Bessie was nevertheless prejudiced against Lotta, not because of her religion but because she sensed intuitively that the blond creature would pull her son down, cause him unhappiness. . . Word had not come from Leon, and already it was five years since he had fled. . . But Bessie did not relinquish hope. God will send him back to me, she thought; and prayed for him.

Gregory's death had caused her anguish that even time had not

softened. She had felt nearer Gregory than any of her other children, and yet she had never been able to crystallize into expression her feelings for him. He was more dependent, she thought, than the other children, yet somehow, he had created a barrier of reserve about him that she had been unable to penetrate. For the other children she had love, but not the same tenderness she had borne for him, and which had become deeply intensified since his death.

What was Israel up to now? she wondered with an almost dispassionate interest. How deeply had he become involved with this blond Mrs. Bamberg? Bessie felt no twinge of jealousy; she had stifled that emotion long ago, but there was a queer, inexplicable pain in her heart. All of her life she had been faithful to him, slaved for him, given freely, unselfishly of herself. With nothing in return. No affection, not even loyalty. She knew that if he were not tied to her by legal bonds, he would have left her years ago. Not that it would have mattered, she thought, he has used me for his purposes all my life. . . Yet, had he shown one spark of tenderness, she would even to-day have forgiven him everything. . .

She was unutterably weary. Weary of everything. How she would like to go back to the soil, to dig her fingers in the rich, moist earth again, to feel its kindness and generosity and abundance course through her anemic blood and warm it again. . .

"Mattie! Mattie, put on the oatmeal for the boys' breakfast!"

III

Israel Challanty stood beside the expensive altar in the new synagogue, wrapped in prayer shawl, mechanically chanting prayers in his slightly hoarse though still beautiful baritone. He was absorbed in his thoughts. He was not thinking of Bessie and his children. He had forgotten Leon and Gregory. Muskenaw was riding on a wave of renewed prosperity. Stocks were rising again and business had improved a hundred per cent. Israel smiled in beatific satisfaction. I have everything, he gloated, everything. . .

About the Cover

Watercolor by Carl Moline

The cover is reproduced from a painting by noted Muskegon artist Carl Moline. It was painted in 1977, utilizing a combined pen and ink and watercolor technique, to illustrate how Western Avenue in the fictional town of Muskenaw, Michigan, may have appeared at one point in the novel during the late 1800's.

(Continued from last page)

Herald, Guideposts, and in magazines abroad. She received the Christopher Award for the Best Short Story of the Year, *Magic Under the Mistletoe*, in McCall's. Selections from her work appear in Guidepost hardcover anthologies and in anthologies for junior high school English students as representative of fine American writing.

As Senior Editor, Trade Department, Prentice-Hall, she has been responsible for editing, rewriting, or collaborating on a number of books, paperback sales of which total in the millions. Among these are *My Shadow Ran Fast* by Bill Sands; *Enthusiasm Makes the Difference* by Dr. Norman Vincent Peale; *Doctor's Quick Weight Loss Diet* by Samm Sinclair Baker; *There Goes What's Her Name* by Virginia Graham; *The Movies, Mr. Griffith and Me* by Lillian Gish; *Jacqueline Kennedy, A Biography*, by G.L. Hall; and *On Thin Ice* by Henry Jelinek.

Recent work by Ann Pinchot includes *The Man Chasers,* published by David McKay Co., and by Avon in paperback, *Weep No More My Lady,* the story of Judy Garland, published by Hawthorne, and by Pyramid in paperback, and *The Heart Doctor's Heart Book* published by Gosset and Dunlap and by Bantam in paperback. Two romantic novels were published by Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich-Pyramid: *Independent Heart,* and *Love Will Find Me*. Her newest novel, *Vanessa,* has a section with a background of Muskenaw, the town in which her early novel, *Hour Upon the Stage*, is set.

About the Author

Ann Pinchot with her poodle, Atholmore Glint of Gold.

Ann Pinchot was born in New York City and grew up in Muskegon, Michigan, where she learned to read by borrowing books from the Hackley Public Library. During her junior year at Muskegon High School she made the notes for *Hour Upon The Stage* which she wrote after her family moved from Muskegon the following year.

Since then her short stories, novels, and serials have appeared in Cosmopolitan, Good Housekeeping, McCall's, American Magazine, Woman's Home Companion, Woman's Day, Christian

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